

Tyne Capsule



“Gad, Carruthers, the lost civilization of Maya.”

Tyne Capsule

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to us to reprint their work. I just hope we have done you and your work
justice, and that you enjoy having it unearthed and remembered.

Where contributors are no longer living, every effort was made to
contact literary executors. Specifically, we contacted Bob Shaw's son. When
the print edition was published, we had to trust that previous consent to
reprint for a Corflu publication was still valid. A few weeks later he contacted
us and affirmed that the family were still happy for us to publish our choice
of Bob's work in affectionate memory of him and his writing.

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- Paul Skelton
- Philip Turner
- Peter Weston
- Ian Williams
- Kevin Williams

– *Rob Jackson, March 2015*
– *amended September 2019*

Introduction

Rob Jackson

Why are we commemorating Gannetfandom nearly 45 years after the group first gathered, with a fanthology? It's a strange claim to fame for a pub with a daft name.

The pub was an unprepossessing subterranean – perhaps “hole” wouldn't be too strong a word; I'd hesitate to dignify it with the term “dive” – in a very plain Sixties shopping arcade in the centre of Sunderland, so unmemorable that even those of us who met there every Tuesday for over three years can hardly remember the actual building or what it looked like. But what it provided was a gathering place for a bunch of us from a load of different backgrounds drawn together by The Usual round these parts – a love of sf and fantasy.

What sort of fun did we have? Boozy weekends away... boozy duplicating parties... boozy conventions.... I'm sure some of it didn't involve booze, though. It's just that those bits weren't so much fun to read or write about.

How did this motley crew end up producing so many fanzines? And later on, being so creative in programming conventions? The richer the mix of any group, presumably the more they spark off each other. Is it a sort of hybrid vigour that turns the liveliest fan groups into fertile grounds for ideas and gives them that creative spark? Alcoholic disinhibition? Who knows? But I'd better shut up, otherwise this would turn into a *Maya* editorial, and there are good reasons why I haven't seen fit to include any of *those* in this collection.

But nothing good lasts forever, and when leading lights or movers and shakers move away, it's inevitable that things change.

The Gannet pub is no more. The shopping arcade it was part of has now been razed to the ground, and presumably replaced. For Sunderland's sake, I just hope something more attractive has taken its place.

The building is not memorable, but its name is. The fans who took its name made it so, within fannish fanzine circles at least.

Tynecon III: The Corflu is being held in Newcastle in March 2015 (later

this month as I write). This year's Corflu organisers chose to name the convention partly as an acknowledgement of the historic role of the fan group that organised two previous *Tynecons*, in 1974 and 1984. So Graham Charnock, as Publications head honcho for *Tynecon III: The Corflu*, suggested a collection of writings associated with Gannetfandom.

But why would he do that? Graham has a pretty astute nose for quality writing. He wouldn't have done it if he didn't think we could unearth some nuggets once we started digging a bit. See what you think.

In choosing the pieces you have here, we collectively agreed I would have freedom to choose writing about Gannetfandom by others, including about events it organised (such as conventions and parties), or published in Gannet fanzines, not just writings by Gannets. The non-Gannets have 29 pages, roughly, but the Gannets 44. I considered a lot of material, but I believe this collection contains writing which has stood the test of time while still evoking a Golden Age. Well, maybe just a brassy age, but it still sparkles in the memory. Read on, and I hope you have fun finding out if I am right.

Rob Jackson, March 2015.

Star Illo

Harry Bell, Gannet Fanzine logo
Multiple appearances, undated



Midnight Shakes the Memory

Harry Turner

From *Kamikaze*, ed. Harry Bell, March 1978

It amazes me how some scraps of paper cling over the years. They refuse to be brushed away. Miraculously survive frequent clear-outs dictated by changing interests. Have a knack of sliding out of folders and envelopes to rot quietly undisturbed in the inaccessible corners of storage space.

I had a cruel clear-out when I gafiated in the late fifties. Really drastic. I gave away a fanzine collection spanning the fannish generations back to the mid-thirties. I burned the accumulated fannish correspondence of years. I disposed of an sf mag collection with pulps that I'd acquired back in those distant days when unsold copies were shipped over to Britain as ballast, and ended up on the market barrows in Manchester – and you could buy 'em for a mere 3d each (only 1¼ of today's inflated pence). And not unnaturally, since resuming contact with fandom in the last few years, there are moments when I deeply regret that action.

Fortunately I keep finding relics that escaped. Cuttings, odd pages from letters, snapshots, notes... preserved in a moment of enthusiasm and then lost and forgotten. Now they turn up, unexpectedly relevant.

Like this article by Charles Burbee, an American-fan-to-be-reckoned-with in the forties, on *How to stop writing for fanzines*. The original has long since disappeared: the paper I hold in my hand is just a copy, and hand-written at that. There's no note of a date but since it is in a faintly laboured italic script, I judge it to have been done in the days when I first started to practise calligraphy – which puts it back more than twenty years. The article appeared in Bill Rotsler's *FAPAZine Masque*, and it still impresses me. I pass on two irresistible quotes:

“It breaks over you eventually – the realisation that you are wasting too much damned time writing for fanzines...”

“... So after a while your brain will no longer turn out fannish ideas for articles and you are comparatively safe, unless you know somebody like Willie Rotsler who is such a fine fellow withal that it is difficult to refuse him when he asks for material. But you buckle down and say, the hell with you

Willie, don't you know I've stopped writing for fanzines? And so, by God, you write an article for *Masque* to show that you can stop writing fanzine articles any time you choose."

Yeah. I know that feeling.

I'm looking at two snapshots. Age has imbued them with a faint tinge of sepia. On one, smirking self-consciously beside Eric Needham and George Ellis, stands my 17-year-old self.

The three of us, as representatives of Manchester fandom, had travelled to Leeds one fine day in 1938. And there we were, at the clubroom – headquarters of the recently formed Science-Fiction Association – meeting the leading lights of Leeds fandom. The event is too far behind me now to be more than a blurred memory of faces and figures, of climbing flights of stairs to an above-shop room, walls covered with a profusion of paintings and photographs, shelves packed with hardback books and pulp mags, of sitting in a creaky cane chair... But I still remember the thrill of making personal contact with other fans, the enthusiasm, the excited chat and argument, a deep sense of fulfilment.

Even then Leeds was a long-established meeting-place for sf fans. Back in 1935 the first British Chapter of the *Wonder Stories*-inspired Science Fiction League had been formed there, and in the year before our visit the first ever British national fan convention had been held in Leeds. That was when the SFA came into being. Yet the glory was soon to fade. A few weeks hence a second convention was planned to take place in London, and the SFA seat of power was destined to drift away from the provinces.

But on this warm Saturday afternoon, aware only of the present, we all trooped down into the yard at the back of the clubhouse, and posed in the spring sunshine. And on my second souvenir of that long-lost day in 1938 a happy group smiles at the camera. Eric and George sit at the front, while I hover with our hosts: Vic Gillard, Doug Mayer, Harry Warnes and Doug Airey.

There's a face missing – Albert Griffiths, one of the mainstays of Leeds fandom at that time. But I guess someone had to hold the camera.

Thinking back, 1938 seems to have been a key year in my early fannish

career. After Leeds I went down to that London convention, a gathering held in a hall owned by the Ancient Order of Druids. (It had an inner sanctum with concealed lighting and impressive papier-mâché Stonehenge decor.)

About 50 fans attended (we were very much a minority group there) and it was my first chance to meet the London fans: Wally Gillings (editing *Tales of Wonder*), Bill Temple, Ted Carnell, Eric Williams, Ken Chapman, Frank Arnold among them. Professor A.M. Low was guest or chairman or something equally important: he was a good front-man at the time, being “one of the most vigorous personalities in modern Science.” Or so he described himself at the head of his regular column in *Armchair Science*, which he happened to edit. A dedicated self-publicist, indefatigable populariser of popular science, and author of a few abysmal sf stories and serials. My only other memory of the official programme is that I.O. Evans was demonstrating his extensive knowledge of all sf written prior to 1938, and Wally Gillings filled us in on his never-ending struggle with publishers to open up the sf market.

I spent a lot of time arguing with Benson Herbert (who recently surfaced in a TV documentary as a psychic investigator) and a fellow-artist from Leeds (whose name eludes me) about surrealism, still a way-out and controversial art form then. And investigating the resources of the SFA book lending library, a seeming vast collection in the days when you had to search out your science fiction.

This con was also the AGM of the SFA and the influx of members from the provinces to live in the Big City enabled the London Branch to vote away the power from Leeds and establish London as HQ. Two of those members were Arthur Clarke, from Taunton, and Maurice Hanson, who left a thriving sf group in Nuneaton (one of the earliest British centres of fanac).

I returned home in a euphoric state, rounded up the local fans and formed a Manchester SFA branch.

I have a couple of sheets of official notepaper, brown with age, held together with a rusty paperclip, from the Executive Headquarters and Council Offices of the Science-Fiction Association. (An expert would detect Arthur Clarke’s fingerprints on them somewhere.) The letter is dated 22 May 1938 and addressed “To our Friends of the new Manchester Branch...”

It was brought up by Arthur and Maurice for the official opening of the

branch in the attic clubroom at my home. A very select gathering, only eight or nine of us. Arthur complimented my mother on the meal she dished up, and she never ceased to remind me of that fact, years after, every time Arthur was mentioned on radio or TV.

I think it's worth quoting something of the letter to try and recreate the dedicated spirit of those days:

"... Whilst we send this message by the hand of two Officials from the Association's Headquarters, we wish to initially take the opportunity of expressing our disappointment that we cannot all be with you...

"We would be serving no useful purpose here if we were to discuss the merits of our favourite form of literature, or the enjoyment derived from the perusal of it, but we do think that you will find, now you have an Association Branch in your fair City, that your science-fiction *will* mean a lot more to you. You will no longer be an individual who reads a queer kind of magazine and has strange notions and ideas, alien to the ordinary layman. No, now you will be in the company of others with coincidental tastes and who think along similar lines to you, yourself.

"You will no longer have to sit down to write a lengthy letter and await an answer if you wish to make contact with others of your own particular zest and perception – you will find these people at your local Branch.

"There you will read, discuss, debate and, mayhap, write science-fiction, you will imbibe fantasy and go away from your meetings with a feeling of satisfaction that it is impossible to obtain other than by direct contact with persons with sympathetic apprehension of your ideas. You will, as we said above, enjoy your science-fiction more.

"We say, with all due pride, that you could not belong to any more dignified or distinguished Association connected with science-fiction, were you to go to the utmost ends of this little speck of cosmic dust we call, Earth. It will place before you and at your disposal the entire extent of its organisation. It will be yours to take advantage of the advantages, services and benefits offered – all that will be much easier now you are members of a Branch.

"Our delegates will discuss with your good Chairman a scheme whereby you can take advantage of the Association Lending Library at vastly reduced rates... that, straightaway is an instance of the extra benefits a Branch brings, and can alone bring, to its members. There are, you will quickly discover, many other attendant boons.

“We are already aware that you have a distinguished and enthusiastic group of members, and you should have no difficulty in making your Branch a phenomenal success. It is to that phenomenal, and, we sincerely trust, early success, that this message is dedicated, together with the felicitations and good wishes of:

G. KENNETH CHAPMAN, Central Exec. Secretary and Chairman of the SFA Council

EDWARD J. CARNELL, Honorary Treasurer

MAURICE K. HANSON, Editor of *Novae Terrae*, etc.

ERIC C. WILLIAMS, Asst. Exec. Secretary and Librarian

SIDNEY L. BIRCHBY, Asst. Exec. Secretary

ARTHUR C. CLARKE, Associate Editor of *Novae Terrae*

WALTER H. GILLINGS

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

JOHN C.H. DRUMMOND Etc., Etc., Etc.”

My ultimate reaction to that was inevitable, I suppose.

War broke out, the SFA folded. And such is fan's ingratitude to fan, that when efforts were made a year or so later to impose another organisation on fandom, I found myself ganging up with Doug Webster in a fanarchist revolt against the organisation men. We lost out, of course, but that's another story.

Star Letter

John Brosnan (on *Maya* 5, ed. Ian Maule, November 1972; published in *Maya* 6, ed. Ian Maule, September 1974)

What a little prick you are! After all I've done for you. First you leave me out of your little con-rep in *Maule's Well...* “the *five* of us,” you say “... would sit in the lounge for hours at a stretch” I counted six. I counted six because I included me. Jesus, just wait until I write my con-rep of the Novacon in 1983. Don't look for *your* name, spotty. Second, you stick me in the WAHF section of your letter column in *Maya*. WAHF! I've never been in the WAHF before, ever! And after I wrote you such a witty, scintillating loc too! Don't look for any more witty locs from me, kid. From now on you get trashy stuff like this, written with one finger while I wait for my can of oysters and mushrooms to heat up.

God, I feel sick at the moment. I thought I'd come down with this flu virus that everyone seems to be getting lately, but the doctor tells me I've got

what those pigs are dying of. Tomorrow a group of vets are coming to set fire to my room.

The romance of the century is over. Pickersgill and I have broken up. Yes, it's true. It happened on the night of his 21st birthday. He wanted to hit me on the head with a bottle of Guinness but, spoilsport as I am, I refused which upset him somewhat. I mean, a birthday treat is one thing but that's going too far. He left Flat 1, 62 Elsham Road, the same night and a smelly era came to an end. I must admit that he has left a gap that is quite hard to fill, namely his half of the rent. And I also miss all his little odd ways and quirks. I've rigged up a machine that hurls shoes across the room for the sake of nostalgia.

Mea Maxima Culpa

Kevin Williams

First published in *Out of the Blue 1* (eds. Harry Bell & Kevin Williams), November 1979

Original art by Harry Bell

As a teenager, I was a distrustful and highly suspicious youth. Suspicious of all organisations, however bland and appealing they might seem to be on the surface. I think I learnt this (what I now consider healthy) trait from my dad who was conscripted into the army during the last war with promises of glory, but soon found himself guarding Pembroke Dock in his best Sunday suit, with a pick-axe handle and ducking Stukas. Apparently, things didn't really get much better, and the whole thing would've been hilariously funny were it not for all those foreigners doing their best to blow you to pieces using the very best man-killing equipment available anywhere in the world at the time.

"There just didn't seem to be many advantages," he explained to me once. "I suppose you could say that I got to see the desert, but the view isn't really very good from the bottom of a trench. All I got from the war was a new set of false teeth, a weak chest and a hernia."

As a wide-eyed, quiet and wary lad, I took all this in and concluded that any organisations that attempted to band people together and tell them to do things as one, was not for me, especially if any risk to life or limb were involved.

The scouts in particular, I avoided, under the suspicion that they were really a secret paramilitary organisation. I was certain that I'd be expected to swear brotherhood in real blood, in some peculiar initiation ceremony, learn strange new handshakes and secret signs, all for the ultimate goal of learning the sublime mystery of the reef knot with the double reverse hitch.

I became an Altar Boy instead.

Much safer work.

Being an Altar Boy, I concluded, held absolutely no chance of catching double pneumonia at some washed out weekend camp or being stabbed with one of those useful 26-function pen-knives by some freaked-out Brownie

high on dubbin. No chance of being assaulted (in my short trousers and white knees) by some dirty old man on bob-a-job day as I tried to accumulate points for my “Pederast Spotting” badge. Absolutely safe (though I’ve often suspected that incense might be carcinogenic).

The great advantage of being an Altar Boy (and the main reason that I joined) was that you automatically became a free member of the local church youth club, which had an old, but serviceable full-sized snooker table, two table-tennis tables and an ancient, 11" TV like a varnished tea-chest. The club was actually in the church crypt, situated directly under the main altar of the church. As crypts go, it was quite sizeable. All sarcophagi had been removed long before and the whole place decorated in the best sixties style – pink, green and yellow whorls on the walls and ceiling – an alcoholic’s nightmare.

Although booze in any form was strictly proscribed by the Himmler-like chief priest of the parish, there were gallons of lemonade and hundreds of packets of the old-style Smith’s crisps (in the waxed paper bags) provided for the angelic Altar Boys by the grateful parishioners. So although it wasn’t possible to get at all intoxicated, a reasonable substitute could be achieved via the consumption of about a dozen bags of crisps followed rapidly by downing two half-empty bottles of lemonade well shaken prior to consumption. It gave a weird feeling of light-headedness, not at all dissimilar to mild drunkenness. The only problem was that as soon as you broke wind, the whole effect was lost and you just felt very sick. So after years of practice the young new Altar Boys would gasp with ill-suppressed admiration for those old masters of the art, who could last a whole hour without breaking wind. However, when they did eventually release this noxious and potentially inflammable mixture of gases, they tended to exude from an altogether different orifice, and we would have to evacuate the crypt.

It was a good life of fizzy euphoria. A time of high living and digestive and sexual experimentation. Being a Catholic church, there were separate clubs for boys and girls and we were only allowed to mix during the Sunday night bop. Since I was the only one with a tape recorder (an ancient t Dansette covered in cream and pink “leatherette”, which started to melt and run whenever the valves began to get a bit hot), I was nominated DJ and consigned, every Sunday afternoon, to record Alan Freeman’s “Pick of the Pops” for that evening’s dance.... and a high, hard and damp time was had by all. Dresses were unzipped, suspenders and knicker elastic snapped, all to cries of mock protest by the flowering, flourishing, sweaty young girls.

Mascara streamed down cheeks and lime green and purple Crimplene skirts rode up over nylon slips and stockings. The air was cut by the occasional lightning bolt of static discharge. In dark corners, hands and fingers wandered in slippery, sweaty and fragrant experimentation.

The worst job of a Sunday night was “Riding Drag” as we called it (Rawhide and Rowdy Yates were very popular at that time) – this was the priest-watching vigil. Three hurried kicks of the crypt door transformed the scene inside the club into one of quiet discursive introspection. Though the rivers of sweat and condensed breath running from the lurid walls would have raised the suspicions of anyone with more than two brain cells to rub together, fortunately the average Irish Catholic priest tended to conform to his country’s national image, and in any case didn’t know anything about sex, and probably thought that girls were really young lads with peculiar dress sense.



On the weekdays, the pleasures were the less earthy and more celibate pursuits of snooker and table-tennis. One of the problems with this free membership as an Altar Boy, was that you were occasionally expected to serve on the altar during services. Now this was accepted as a part of life on Sundays, but considered particularly irksome during the week. Weekday services generally only lasted a half hour, and were considered a real waste of time by the lads, since there was no audience... errr congregation... to play to. The most that ever turned up were two or three pensioners, an asthmatic nun and “the man who coughed like Miriam Karlin” (Rag Trade was also on TV). Fortunately unlike Sunday, there was no serving rota and so the priest had to rely on catching a few Altar Boys in the club. The large cupboards where the cues and other equipment were stored, proved good hiding places and the

priests, in their innocence, couldn't conceive of anyone not wanting to serve, and *never looked*. Frequently, all we had to do was turn out the light and hide under the snooker-table. So, the priest would maybe collar one, new young innocent not quite quick enough on his feet and the service would go ahead accompanied by the sounds of coughing and wheezing in the church, and the seductive click of snooker balls from the crypt below.

But youthful anticipations were shattered. I was to learn that this idyllic life of ease and experience had its drawbacks and maybe wasn't as safe as I had hoped. One of the main drawbacks was that when we were serving, we were compelled to wear a white, lacy, frock-like thing called a "Surplus". (I don't know why they were called that. We never seemed to have enough to go around.) We also had to carry candles mounted on long stick holders. Then, on one never to be forgotten Sunday morning after a pretty bad night on the Smiths and Tizer, I was kneeling, and trying desperately to hold my three foot long candle holder upright, with a thunderous headache and rebellious stomach. I failed. Pink and yellow whorls whirled before my eyes. The sickly sweet smell of incense pervaded my head. I suddenly became very hot and very cold at the same time. The next thing I remember was my head hitting the marble altar steps. Hard. I came around immediately and rolled back on to my knees, face burning with embarrassment, hoping that nobody in the congregation had noticed. The priest hadn't, his back was turned. But he was soon to find out, for it was only then that I realised that my candle holder was no longer in my hands. A high pitched wail apprised me of its location. It had rolled about three feet to my right and was at that moment lying between the legs of one of the other Altar Boys whose senses were also dulled by the previous night's fizzy excesses. He too was just waking up, as a severe burning sensation swept up his back caused by his surplus starting to smoulder and burn. It must have been quite a sight. One wailing Altar Boy sprinting off the altar, surplus aflame, chased by a second, frantically trying to beat out the ever growing flames. Luckily, the portable Holy Water font at the side of the altar had recently been replenished and there was just enough in it to extinguish all the flames with a hiss, a crackle and a whiff of incense. Gosh, life was fun in the Altar Boys' brigade!

I resigned soon afterwards (it is indeed an ill-founded rumour that I was the only Altar Boy in the diocese of South Wales ever *sacked*). From then on, I had to pay for my membership of the Youth Club, but somehow, it was never the same again – though I was a minor hero for a short time.

I have never since associated myself with any other such paramilitary organisation. Being an Altar Boy was just too rough on the nerves. I decided to dedicate the rest of my life to the pursuit of ease and peace.

Many years later I discovered Fandom. It fit my self-imposed criteria perfectly:

It doesn't have uniforms (apart from Greg's).

There are no high priests (apart from D.)

Drunkenness is mandatory.

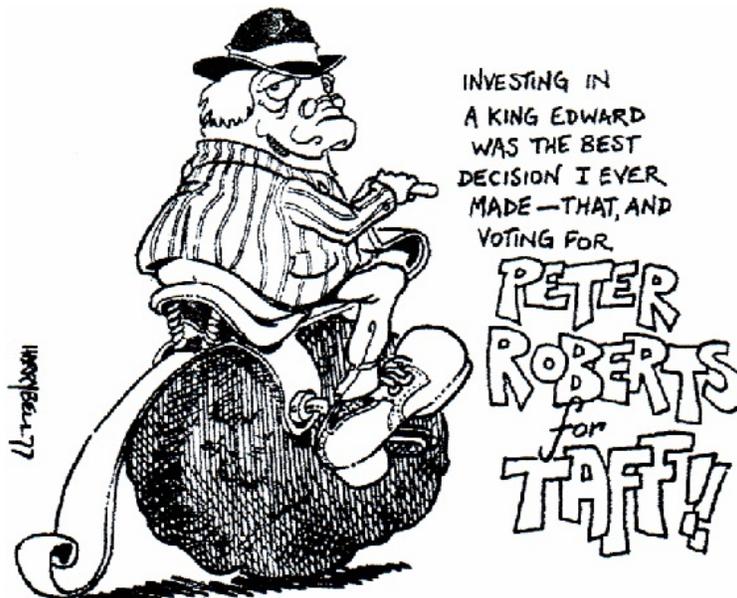
There is virtually no chance of bursting into flames (provided you avoid Harry's breath).

Above all, it doesn't expect.

I could be a fan for a long time.

Star Illo

Harry Bell, first published in *Tocsin*, March 1977, ed. Harry Bell



Flocking Together – How the Gannets Gathered

A compilation of First Contact tales

Harry Bell, Ian Williams, Ian Maule, Rob Jackson, Dave Cockfield

Harry Bell, *Armadillos in the Skirting Board 1* (ed. Harry Bell), Frank's APA, October 1983

It's traditional in the first mailing of an apa to introduce yourself. When Hansen and I discussed this he dismissed it as unnecessary because "We've both been around long enough for everyone to know who we are." However, it occurs to me that I've been around so long (20 years next year) that some of you *don't* know all that much about me. Come to that, what do I know about Tony Berry? Just who is this Tony Berry and how did he find out what he knows?

OK, so bear with me while I run through it again. I'm 36, have been a civil servant with the DHSS for 19 years and discovered fandom in late 1964. John Barfoot, then a member of PaDS and editor of *Bumblie*, introduced me to fandom in the form of Mary Reed and I joined both the BSFA and PaDS the following year. It may be interesting to note that my grasp of the fannish concept was such that I thought I *had* to join the BSFA to "join" fandom.

PaDS, incidentally, for those of you who are still unsure of the term, was a British apa which stepped into the breach when both OMPA and Fifties fandom were running down. It stood for Printing and Distributing Service and was started by Charles Platt, then British fandom's *enfant terrible*, as a system of encouraging even those without typewriter or duplicator to start a fanzine. What this led to, of course, particularly with the lack of any established example to follow (you could hardly call Archie Mercer an example to follow) was a plethora of identically typed and duplicated fanzines full of fiction, poetry and pedestrian science fact (one day I must print the fifteen page Bryn Fortey article on what will happen "When the Sun Goes Nova").

I started to read through stacks of old Fifties fanzines, given to me by Barfoot before he gafiated, and discovered the social possibilities of fandom, the intricate web later to be celebrated in West's colossal "Performance." I published two issues (4 & 5) of *Grimwab* trying to get across what I'd discovered, then gafiated in 1968.

It might be generally thought that when Ian Williams, our own little Gannetfather, wakened me from my slumbers to help in the Creation, we were in effect starting up the North-East's first fan group. Not so. Already in existence as early as 1966, when I went to *Yarcon*, my first convention, was a group centred in Chester-le-Street. They'd been meeting regularly since the mid-Fifties and in all probability are continuing to do so in a more or less haphazard way. George Lye, Con Turner and Jim Marshall were the mainstays of the group and Jim it was who took me to my first three cons.

Perhaps more than reading old fanzines, it was Jim's, Con's and George's irreverent attitude to both sf and fans that taught me what fandom ought to be about. The main butt of their jokes was Phil Harbottle, or Phil the Bottle as they liked to call him, who'd left the group in something approaching disgust shortly before I made contact. Phil had been the driving force behind many of the group's original schemes to Spread SF to the Masses. Acting as the North-East Science Fiction Society – NESFES – they organised library exhibitions of Exciting Skiffy material, mainly, I assume, Phil's collection of John Russell Fearn junk. They published a group fanzine called *Gestalt*, but as far as I can gather Phil the Bottle began to have doubts about the serious intent of the others when scurrilous gossip in the form of "Clippings" by Bushey Hedge started to take up large parts of the zine.

To get NESFES back on an even keel again and to make a determined effort to recruit new members, it was agreed to set up a Publicity Sub-Committee. The Lambton Arms in Chester-le-Street was reckoned to be a convenient place for them to meet and it wasn't long before the Publicity Sub-Committee had been re-christened the Sublicity Pub-Committee. When I finally got in touch with them NESFES was no more, but the Sublicity Pub-Committee was still going strong. The very essence of fandom, I call that.

– *Harry Bell*

Ian Williams, *Maya* 5 (ed. Ian Maule), November 1972, Goblin Towers column:

First Foundations: or, Do You Have Any Regrets, Gray Boak?

If it hadn't been for a fat sadistic landlady you might not be reading this today.

My first brush with fandom was seeing a mention of *Speculation* in *IT* (*International Times*). So I wrote off to Superpete for a copy and liked it. But it got me no further as regards actual contact with fans. Dead end there.

But I was persistent. I bought the first issue of *Vision of Tomorrow*, thought it rubbish and sent a glowing letter to Phil Harbottle, sneakily asking him if he knew of any fans in the area where I lived which happened to be Ormskirk in south west Lancashire at the time. I actually received a personal reply, something I hadn't really expected, and he included the address of the BSFA. I wrote off to that and received a reply from Beryl Mercer telling me of all the good things that could come my way. I broke my own sprint record getting to the post box that day. Then copies of *Wadezine* and *Free Orbit* arrived with a letter from Audrey Walton. Apart from *Vector* and *Spec* they were the first fanzines I'd seen. They had names in them like Boak, Holdstock, Kettle and Hall, and it still didn't put me off. I even sent a few poems and a couple of book reviews. Then I got the address of the Liverpool group and received a non-committal reply when I wrote so I didn't bother any further. So I *still* hadn't any real contact with fans.

By then it was Xmas '69, I'd fucked up teaching and gone back home to Sunderland. I was at a dead end with little real idea of what I wanted to do. I was so low the cat started kicking me. Then a friend who was at the LSE suggested I go down to London and live with him and a few other friends. That sounded promising, visions of getting into publishing came into my head. I was very ignorant and naive in those days.

So I moved into the ground floor of a house just round the corner from Streatham Common station. Early January, it was cold and snowed almost interminably. The upstairs flat contained two blokes whom we hardly saw, and an attic above that housed two girls. Then one of them moved out.

One evening, a couple of days later, the remaining girl pounded at our door. We let her in, her eyes streaming with tears. Our landlady, who as I've already said was fat and sadistic, had been round demanding more rent and when she was refused beaten the girl up. I made her a cup of coffee and she began to calm down, we started talking about anything except her recent experience and somehow sf was mentioned. And one of her friends was Richard Gordon. I'd seen a piece by him in a copy of *Speculation*. He came round a couple of days later to help the girl move out and she introduced us.

He wasn't quite my type of person but we had an interesting conversation. It turned out he was going to the Globe the following week for the February meeting and hadn't been in a long time; so he invited me to come with him on the assumption, it seemed, that if there wasn't anyone there he knew at least he could talk to me.

I did know of the Globe's existence but hadn't tried to find out where it was because the thought of me going up to a crowd of complete strangers, none of whom had heard of me, and talking to them was absolutely ridiculous. I just didn't have the nerve. But if I went with Richard, at least I could talk to him even if he did seem to be something of an oily southerner.

I turned up at his comfortable flat off Earl's Court at the appointed time. In fact I was probably early as that's more in character. Anyway, he wasn't ready and gave me a pile of fanzines to read while I waited, several of which had columns in by him. These included a few *Warhoons* with material written by Richard whilst he was in the States. One of the other US zines lying around was *Odd* with the Gaughan/ Bode cartoon battle – I've never seen something like that before or since, nor have I ever seen that one again.

We got to the Globe around eight. It was crowded full of people, far more it seems than when I revisited the place recently. A tallish girl (any girl who reaches higher than five foot six in shoes is tall) came over to us and gave Richard a friendly old friends greeting.

"Ian," he said, "this is Mary Reed. Mary, Ian's a Geordie as well." This seemed to please Mary immensely and we started talking about our ex-homeland. I was surprised to find she still regarded herself as a Geordie even after living in the south for twelve years. Eventually Mary wandered off and I attached myself to some people Richard was talking to.

One of this lot was rather dishevelled, wearing a dirty tweed overcoat and an unshaven face. He wasn't much taller than myself and didn't look much older either. (I was twenty-one at the time.) He talked animatedly, his features twitching.

"Masturbation machines are going to take over," he was saying. "I've seen them in L.A. You step inside a booth and you literally plug yourself in. Then you see a picture of a girl writhing in orgasm in such a position as to suggest you're doing it yourself. And there are sound effects as well."

"You sound as if you enjoyed it," I said grinning. He laughed.

"Do you write any sf or do anything for, er, fanzines?" I asked.

Before he could answer, a girl standing next to me tugged my sleeve and

whispered: “Ian, this is Charles Platt.”

“Oh,” I said. “I liked *Garbage World*.” I never discovered until weeks later that the really funny *faux pas* was not asking him if he wrote any sf but whether he did anything for fanzines.

I moved on again after a bit and got involved with Mary and ½r Crut10den. ½r told me about the time he voluntarily incarcerated himself for his kleptomaniac tendencies. Then Mary enlightened me some more about fandom. By this time I realised I was having one of the most enjoyable evenings of my entire life. It was fairly late on by then and I was more than a little drunk and very garrulous. Somehow I got talking to John Brunner. I started by taking *The Jagged Orbit* to pieces. He agreed with some of the points I made and offered me a cigarette.

I got back to my flat around midnight, pissed, prostrate, happy, hiccupping.

– Ian Williams

Ian Williams, *Maya 9*, (ed. Rob Jackson), November 1975, Goblin Towers column:

I’ve lived nearly all my life in Sunderland, in the same house. I did spend three and a half abortive years in Lancashire training to be a teacher. At the end of them, I moved down to London, stayed with a student friend, did a variety of temporary work, and discovered fandom. Living there didn’t suit me either so I came home. I came home to find I had virtually no friends left and there were no jobs. For three months I sat in the house, read books, listened to records, vegetated. That did me no good, so I got a job in a library and tried starting a science fiction fan group.

The Gannet is a subterranean pub. You get to it by going down some steep steps and turning a corner. Straight ahead of you is a medium sized room. In the room, the seats form a large M shape, or rather two adjacent U’s. In the corner of one of these U’s on the second Tuesday of September 1970, a bunch of people gathered. Most of us had met several times before, but it had been decided it was more convenient to meet at a pub in the centre of Sunderland on a quiet evening. I suggested the Gannet, having had my twenty-first there and thought it a reasonable place.

I arrived shortly after finishing work at the library at 7.30 and was the first there. (This was to prove a frequent occurrence.) Eventually, the others turned up. There was Harry Bell, a link with the past as he had been in

fandom long before any of us, but had gaffed because there were no other fans in the area and he felt he was losing touch with the outside world. Harry is a couple of inches taller than me and of similar girth. Then, as now, he was a civil servant. He was also recently engaged and brought along with him his fiancée Irene Taylor, a pleasant-looking bespectacled girl with rounded features and long fair hair. Ian Penman is an old school acquaintance of mine who had never gotten over his infatuation with American comix and had begun his own comics fanzine *Armageddon*. At the time he was at the local college of education, training to be a teacher. Ian had introduced me to a friend of his called Jim Marshall (**). Jim had a gadfly interest in a number of subjects – mainly sf, comics, fantasy and drawing. He was a very talented artist, and at the time had aspirations of drawing for Marvel. His idiosyncratic views on things were both refreshing and annoying, a nice contrast to Ian’s smooth reasonableness. Then there were Thom Penman and Ritchie Smith, blood brothers of sixteen and still at school. They were both fascinated with the “underground” despite knowing little about it. They also had high hopes of becoming sf pro’s and, after reading some of their material, I thought so too. They tended towards the cynical but had seen so little of life that it was purely a superficial adolescent mask, Ritchie (“craggily ambling”) came over as an intellectual yob, Thom (bird-like, nervously agitated) a milder version (but at the same time more extreme in some of his fatuous pronouncements). We had high hopes of these two, which rose when Thom was expelled from school as a disruptive influence and Ritchie warned.

*** Not the same Jim Marshall who had been part of NESFES’s Sublicity Pub-Committee as described by Harry Bell.*

So we met and talked, feeling each other out, trying to find common ground, to relate to each other.

For a long while we simply called ourselves the North East Science Fiction Group. It wasn’t until the following year that a certain Greg Pickersgill named us Gannetfandom.

Suddenly we had an identity; we weren’t just a science fiction group. We were Gannetfandom.

– *Ian Williams*

Ian Maule, IntheBar e-list, 2009:

When I joined the BSFA in 1970 they published my name and address in *Vector* or one of their other publications (new members list?). Ian W. saw

it and wrote to me with an invitation to come along to the Gannet pub to meet local SF enthusiasts. The rest, as they say, is history.

I remember on that first visit Ian W. being slightly surprised that this most neo of neos was already getting *Fouler*. (I think I got some fanzines from Audrey Walton of the BSFA and may have written to Greg asking for a copy of *Fouler* after seeing mention of it.)

– Ian Maule

Rob Jackson, editorial, *Maya* 14, June 1977; abridged & rewritten:

When I was in the Oxford University Speculative Fiction Group in 1972, their library had a small box of fanzines, including some fannish ones which OUSFG members mentioned, if at all, in whispers. But when I joined the BSFA, out of devilment I ticked the box which said I was interested in fanzines. And I got some: *Foulers* 2 and 3 by the youthful Greg Pickersgill and Roy Kettle - and John Piggott's *Turning Worm* 2, as well as some older ones.

By the time I'd got and puzzled over these fanzines it was time for me to leave Oxford and continue my medical training in Newcastle. I missed the company at the OUSFG, and goddammit, they were 250 miles away! And I didn't know any sf folk up here... but wait a minute... With little hope I glanced through *Turning Worm* 2.

Associate Editor and Slave, one Ian Maule, at an address nearby in Gosforth.

Directory Enquiries: "There aren't any Maules at that address... wait a minute. Did you say 59 Windsor Terrace? Is this lad's father an ex-policeman? Because there's a Doug Maule, a friend of mine, recently moved from Windsor Terrace to Forest Hall. Let me look up the recent numbers. 662622. Give my best wishes to Mr. Maule."

Forest Hall – all of half a mile from me! I rang. There was indeed an Ian Maule there, and I could speak to him.

So if the Directory Enquiries man hadn't happened to know Ian's father, I might have just shrugged my shoulders and gone on typing stories, but later found a non-fan girlfriend or something and never thought of other sf fans again. Such are twists of fate...

– Rob Jackson

Dave Cockfield, *Atropos 1* (ed. Dave Cockfield), editorial, October 1975:

My misfortunes began on a Friday night in November 1974, when I decided to investigate a Science Fiction group which was starting in the area. The most memorable night was when Chris Priest was the speaker. I would rather forget, but cannot because it has been tape recorded for posterity. I had been drinking Lunatic's Broth all night and was active enough to ask Chris a few questions, none of which I could remember the next day. To remedy this I bought a tape of the meeting. At the end of the tape of Chris's excellent talk I waited to hear my voice but it never came, or so I thought. I repeated the section containing the questions but it was just not there. I played it again for a third and final time, thinking I had been edited out in favour of the drunk who was shouting his stupid head off – then it dawned on me that I *was* the drunk. Needless to say, I now stay sober if I have anything important to ask an author whom I enjoy.

– *Dave Cockfield*

Star Illo

Harry Bell, first published in *Atropos 3*, August 1976, ed. Dave Cockfield



Goblin Towers – The Demo

Ian Williams

Published in *Maya* 7, ed. Rob Jackson, February 1975

Original art by Harry Bell

It's pretty soon going to be the occasion of the fifth anniversary of my first meeting face to face with another science fiction fan, an event I described in the last episode of this column. I've spent most of my adult life in fandom, i.e. six months after my twenty-first birthday to date. Of course, thanks to a piece of government legislation kids are now considered adult at eighteen. I sometimes feel as if most of my actual life has been spent in fandom. My life before I entered fandom seems a long time ago. However, the recent interest – or rather nostalgia – for the sixties has brought back a surge of memories. I was a teenager in those days, a rather naive, shy one at that. Remember the latter half of that decade? When rock music was really getting going and (now I'm getting to it) student power raised its revolutionary head?

I was a student at Edge Hill College of Education, Ormskirk, Lancashire, training to be a teacher. Ormskirk is a little market town in the middle of the south-west corner of that county. It is a thirty minute train ride to Liverpool, one of England's ugliest cities, and a bumpy forty minute bus journey from Southport, which is an attractive place for a seaside resort, and one that specializes in old people wanting a quiet place to die and teenagers with drug problems, an unusual combination to say the least. I lived in digs in Southport for a year; from time to time I visited Liverpool, but mostly I hung around college. It was a placid college with very little social conscience and no-one wanting to stand out as different. We were cosseted and treated as children. You could be sent down for being found in a girl's room outside of normal visiting hours. Those in halls of residence had to be in by eleven o'clock; you needed parental permission to go away for the weekend. Nobody had even heard of marijuana. It encouraged neither independence nor maturity. By the beginning of my third year in October '68, things were beginning to get a little more interesting, and the outside world had started to creep in a little way.

A few guys had begun selling *International Times* to interested students. I happened to be one. *IT* was the first underground paper I'd seen and showed me a way of life I found rather boggling. I also found I sympathised with many of the ideals pictured but felt the actual activities rather futile.

IT also made me aware in greater depth of student revolutionary activity and the marches, of which 1968 really saw the abortive culmination. I thought, now and again, of my friend Dave who was just spending his first term at that activist hotbed called the London School of Economics, one of Britain's highest ranked educational institutions. I was curious as to what he was up to, so I phoned him at his digs and got an invitation to come down for a weekend. We fixed it up for three weeks later.

Quite a lot happened during those three weeks. The L.S.E. students revolted and took over their buildings. The largest ever march to Hyde Park was planned. And by sheer coincidence it was the weekend I was supposed to go down. Oh well, I thought, Dave was hardly the type to get involved in that load of crap. It never occurred to me that I'd end up carrying a placard in the middle of about 70,000 students.

A girl I knew vaguely was going to London that weekend and suggested we hitch down together. So shortly after breakfast on Friday morning we set off. Thanks to her brashness we only waited five minutes at an M6 access road before getting a lift direct to the big city itself.

I was supposed to meet Dave at Victoria station under the clock at five. I waited an hour then phoned his digs. It took me an hour and a half to get through. I found out later that the daughter of the house was phoning her boyfriend. At last the phone was picked up at the other end.

"Oh, we weren't expecting you until tomorrow," said a female voice. "David is spending the night at LSE. But you'd better come over."

It was then that I had the feeling that this weekend was not going to be at all like I expected. I got the train, was met at the station, and driven to a respectable middle class house. I spent the evening reading, watching TV, and making polite conversation - and also getting some details of the LSE student takeover. It had been going on for at least a week. There were, apparently, barricades in corridors, a police cordon at streets that led to the entrances of the LSE and lectures in revolution. They said Dave would probably be back by the following afternoon.

I wasn't prepared to hang around the house all day waiting for him to turn up, so I thought I'd go to the L.S.E. to look for him and duly received the

appropriate directions.

(I've been writing all this in the first person, yet I was really a rather different person then, both physically and mentally. I was slimmer for a start; the beer paunch I have now hadn't yet begun to develop. My hair was short; you could see my ears. There were no lines under my eyes. I wore a check sports jacket, a yellow nylon turtle neck shirt, grey trousers with turnups, and a pair of brown suede shoes. A very innocuous person indeed. I was awkward, gauche, imperceptive and insensitive. I tended, without meaning to, to tread on people's toes. A well-meaning bumbler who was, at the same time, gaining some awareness. I'd begun writing poetry and trying to explore my environment through that. A mass of post-adolescent strivings and unfulfilled potential. My young eyes were wide at staring at the big city. I didn't realise quite how much I had to learn and how much growing up I had to do, dammit I was twenty! Get the picture? Looking back on the me of six years ago I feel rather patronising towards him, for he was really quite innocent. Though sometimes I feel I envy him...)

The London School of Economics is situated down a side street that one enters from the bottom of Shaftesbury Avenue (if memory serves). I went down it, turned a corner and found myself staring at the backs of about a dozen large policemen who were looking idly down an alley at the entrance of LSE some thirty yards away. Muttering polite and respectful "excuse me"s, I squeezed by them and apprehensively approached the double glass doored entrance. I glanced up at the towering buildings that seemed to close in oppressively.

The entrance area was rather small and crowded. On my right were stairs and a lift, ditto on my left. Straight ahead was a long table with about four people sitting behind it answering questions and looking very harassed. (Had I been precognitive, I'd have said they looked like a convention committee.) Milling around was a curious mixture of long-haired, popular image student-types and people wearing quite ordinary clothing with hair about as long as mine. One dark-complexioned couple sat on a stair reading the *Black Dwarf* and gabbling to each other in what sounded like Spanish. It was very much an amalgam of Third World students. I asked a guy sitting at the table how I could find my friend. He told me it would be pretty difficult and the best thing for me to do was either to stay in this area or pin a notice to the board behind me and have a wander round.

After half an hour, I opted for the second course and started down a

corridor. It was rather a tatty old place, as I remember it. Revolutionary posters alternated incongruously on the wall with official college notices. I heard a rather loud voice coming from behind a set of double doors. A notice on one of them informed me it was a lecture on revolutionary economics – “all welcome”. All I knew of economics was from an abortive three months in the sixth form at grammar school, after which I gave it up in favour of Religious Education, but I was curious and went in. I found myself in a large hall, and rather crowded at that. On the podium a smart looking guy in his late twenties was talking rather fervently. I found myself a seat a couple of rows from the back and listened. It was apparent very quickly that I was way out of my depth. Whilst I thought I could understand each individual sentence he came out with, I *couldn't* relate them into any meaningful whole. In other words, it was just gabble to me. I stayed about twenty minutes, more to look at the listeners than anything else, then took up my travels again. I spent another hour in a futile hunt for Dave, before phoning his digs to find out that he'd arrived there an hour after I'd left.

We spent the afternoon looking around London, visiting shops and things. I knew the West End vaguely through having spent a week's holiday in London so it wasn't totally new to me. Dave talked about the student takeover and what had been going on.

“Oh yes,” he said. “We're also going on the big march tomorrow.”

I was stunned.

“But what about all the violence you read about in the papers, hitting and bashing and big policemen,” I burred.

“You're quite safe as long as you stay in the middle of the crowd,” he said.

“Great.” Unenthusiastically.

“I'll take you round Soho tonight.”

“Great?” Doubtful, but interested.

“It's a fantastic place.”

“Great!” Great.



Soho. Bright lights, dark shadowed doorways, crowded narrow streets, postcards in windows, bookshops with pictures of naked ladies, restaurants, old buildings with preservation orders, plaques on walls, delicatessens, people, people, and plenty of strip clubs with pictures of naked ladies; a mixture of old and tawdry new. Dave was telling me of how some strip clubs try to cheat you by making you pay twice, or paying at one place which was just a front and the actual club being elsewhere, but we were going to one anyway, he said. So we went strip club window-shopping, staring at the photographs outside, and the prices, and comparing them. Finally we settled on one and went in. We must have struck lucky, as we weren't cheated and just paid the ten shillings.

Now young, naive and innocent as I was, the female body wasn't exactly a complete mystery to me: I'd been out with a few girls who'd permitted me to do more than hold hands. All the same a strip club was quite a new and different experience for me.

Mostly it was boring.

I got an erection with the first act I saw – two girls routinely pulling each other's clothing off, chewing all the time. I got a second one from an attractive, big busted girl who actually seemed to enjoy what she was doing and who sexually teased the audience. (A proper striptease, I suppose.) But they were the only two vicarious sexual kicks I got in the entire couple of hours we spent there. Not that I objected to attractive naked female bodies, mind, but that was all they were. I did get two other positive emotions while I was there: one was amusement, the other disgust. A tall blonde girl got a lot of heckling from a pissed member of the audience all through her act. At the end of it, she did an about face, bent down, presented her cheeks to the

audience, stuck a hand between her legs and gave him the V -sign. The “set” of the act that turned my stomach was a prison cell with a large swastika on the wall; “Mars” from “The Planets” was playing loudly in the background. A girl clad in rags was lying on the floor of the cell. In strode a big Aryan blonde carrying a whip, a toy machine gun and smoking a cigarette. There was the expected tearing off of the prisoner’s clothes and removing of her own; that was okay. It wasn’t just that of course. She also appeared to whip the girl, ram the butt end of the whip up her cunt, and stub her cigarette out on the girl’s nipples, all accompanied by loud screams. She finally shot the prisoner, then swaggered about the stage with the machine gun sticking from her crotch. Before stalking off, she glared at the audience (I cringed in my seat) and said, “Don’t think I didn’t enjoy that because I did!” A few months later, I read in the *News of the World* (that well-known Sunday paper which enjoys huge sales because of its detailed descriptions of “immoral” activities which it then condemns) that that particular act had been busted for obscenity.

Sunday morning came bright and sunny. Breakfast was bacon and eggs which I forced into an apprehensive stomach.

“Er Dave, are you really...”

“Nothing to worry about, man, nothing.” Quite a successful womaniser was Dave (still is), but I wasn’t too convinced on his judgement about other things. Still, I couldn’t let a friend down, though the idea of going back to college a day early did have a certain appeal.

We threaded our way through LSE corridors, wending our way upwards until we came to a room full of people busy making and putting the finishing touches to placards. There was quite a variety of them. One showed a photograph of American soldiers displaying severed Vietnamese heads and bore the words: “Whose violence? Remember what we’re protesting *against*.” There were a number of simple ones: the word “Revolution” in red against the background of a yellow star, a hand clutching a spanner underneath the words “Workers’ control”, socialist posters, communist, revolutionary exhortations, Viet Nam protests. I chose one that urged support of the unions because it had a nice caricature of a greedy capitalist. I picked up the placard on its stick, put it over my shoulder, and feeling in complete solidarity with my brother students strode with Dave out of the building and down to the Thames Embankment where the massed hordes were gathering.

The filthy Thames even looked attractive glittering in the bright

sunshine. Dave and I moved into the middle of the throng and stood patiently waiting to move. The magic time of two p. m. finally came round and the crowd seemed to murmur, then slowly move, one foot at a time, like a large python just beginning to feel pangs of hunger. (That's not a derogatory comparison; I like pythons.) There was a number of policemen on either side of the road watching (waiting?). There was also a bunch of fascists sporting swastikas on their shirts (the act the previous evening flickered briefly through my mind), holding their right arms in the air, fists clenched, sniggers on their faces. (Not like, I thought, feeling the back of my neck itch, not like.) I was suddenly very wary, but nothing happened.

Slowly, almost silently, the march crept to the entrance of Fleet Street. Almost instantly, the atmosphere began to change. It was as if everyone, at the same time, had suddenly thought: Well, we're here now, let's make the best of it. The chants began.

One voice shouted: "American Imperialismmm!" Then the marchers together: "OUT!" This was repeated twice more, then on the last refrain a deafening "OUT! OUT! OUT!" Immediately another voice yelled (this was shortly after the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, remember): "Russian Imperialismmm!" to receive equally loud support. The faces of the marchers had, by and large, grins on them; there was a noticeably good humoured atmosphere ("an atmosphere of freaky holiday"?). Above us and to the side were the boarded up windows of shops and newspaper offices. Small timid faces peered down. When we got up to the offices of the *Daily Express*, a paper noted for giving students a bad write-up, a chant arose: "*Daily Express!* BURN! *Daily Express!* BURN! *Daily Express!* BURN! BURN! BURN!" Followed by noticeable giggles as faces above went white. At Rhodesia House, the chant was: "Ian Smith! FUCK!" Marching slowly in the middle of a unified, laughing crowd I felt great, solid, a kind of oneness.

When we got to Trafalgar Square, I nearly wet myself.

The policemen must have been in ranks ten deep. Literally hundreds of them on either side. Ones with peaked caps riding big bastards of horses.

"Now I'm really scared, Dave," I said. "I hope nothing happens." To decrease the chances of getting hurt, I pulled my poster from its stick, dropped the latter, and rolled the former up and stuck it inside my jacket, keeping it in position with my elbow. It seemed to take an age in purgatory, moving along those corridors of policemen, to get out of Trafalgar Square. My eyes kept flickering at the rather frightening uniformed gentlemen, never

letting my eyes linger in case that was used as an excuse for something. When we did turn the corner out of the sight of those damned lions, there were united sighs of relief.

At one stage the marchers thinned out, allowing a chance of a brief run, a wonderful thing after the tediously enforced slow pace up till then. I ran giggling and laughing with the rest, exhilarated, my individuality gone, only the high of being part of a mass of people with one purpose was left. (It was only hours later that the implications of what I *could* have done in that state really sank in.)

The elation continued; Hyde Park came nearer. We passed by one guy on a traffic island who tried to pull someone's placard down. He got a few thumps for his pains and was hauled away by police. And that was all the violence I saw.

Finally, we were there, and the marchers were spreading out. We could hear the amplified voice of Tariq Ali and see his agitated form on a stand, a small dark figure some yards away. Dave and I stood quietly listening. After about ten minutes we looked at each other.

"Christ, this is boring," he said.

"Yeah."

"Let's go home." So we did.

I travelled back to Ormskirk by bus the next day. Part of the time I read a book called *Captives of the Flame* (or some such) by a guy called Samuel R. Delany. It was an American edition, a thing called an Ace Double which I'd never seen before and had picked up for a bob along with a few others from a small newsagent near Westminster. But mostly I thought of the march. The terrifying lack of individuality I'd felt and the tremendous high that had gone with it, the mindless elation. It was a sort of positive happiness, a *good* feeling. But what would have occurred if some nasty incident had happened to turn the mood of the marchers? What would the crowd have done? What would that tiny cell of it that had been me have done?

But it was a good march, a peaceful demonstration of opposition to a savage and unnecessary war and I was glad to have been part of it, to have stood up, even in a minor way, to be counted. It was worthwhile and I had no regrets. I had done something positive.

I got into Ormskirk around six and made straight for the college campus. Wearily I made for my room in Stanley Hall of Residence. The wooden door with my room number on it was a reassuring sight. I turned the key in the

lock and pushed. The door opened half an inch. Straight away I knew what had happened. Someone had climbed along the ledge on the outside wall from the room next door, got in through my window, pushed all the furniture against the door and left the way he had come in.

I'm back, I thought, as I put my underdeveloped shoulders against the door and started to shove.



Star Letters

Greg Pickersgill (on *Maya 2*, ed. Ian Williams, April 1971; published in *Maya 3*, April 1972, ed. Ian Maule):

Now look, you've got to forget all this shit about sf. If there's anything *really* worth saying Weston or little Malcolm will pick it up – all you're doing is perpetuating a lot of old crapola that will be forgotten and wiped

across someone's poxy anus almost before the ink is dry. Who remembers old fanzines that concentrated in any tangible fashion on sf? No one except nutters like Harbottle or Ackerman. Now the faanzines, something else again. *Hyphen* being an obvious example, but you could pick almost any other name more or less at random. Course, what you're doing is alright if you're solely concerned with being a little flash in a tiny frying pan lasting two milliseconds on the vast timescale of cosmic fandom – but you'll have to concentrate on Boak and Legg and similar fans and fannings if you want to be memorable. Who's going to remember *Quicksilver* in ten years' time? I might, because I know Malcolm, but will Ian K. Taylor of Surrey?

FANDOM is what's important – that's what needs chronicling, needs the interest, the laying down on paper, the perpetuating. Not these green pearls of wisdom that you're dropping about Lafferty and the mutability of change (or whatever the fuck it was about). Any twat with the ability to marshal three thoughts into line can do that. You, you're a bloody fan FAN FAN FAN what you wasting valuable paper for? I mean, make the gesture if you have to, just here and there, tip your hat to the gods, Knight, Geis, Blish and Edwards, but just remember what it's all about. Don't lose sight of reality. Sf is going to carry on and on and on and bloody on without your piddling little contribution to the literature. Fandom will doubtless carry on and on without you too, but you're in a real position to make a fucking difference to that. What's the matter with you, don't you want to live forever???

Terry Hughes (on *Maya* 3, April 1972; published in *Maya* 4, July 1972, ed. Ian Maule):

I'm afraid I must disagree with Pickersgill. Now while I too love fannish fanzines best of all and would like to see *Maya* be one, I can't accept his argument. Fandom is *fun* dammit, or it should be and fans should do what they want. If someone likes sercon stuff let him write it or do a sercon zine – I enjoy well done serious discussion also. Or if someone wants to be lighthearted and full of fun, with the interests centred on fans themselves, then he can write/draw/publish faanishness. But fanac should be done for pleasure not so that one will “live forever” – if a fan goes in with the attitude that he will be fannish so that he'll be famous and well remembered, he'll be in for a big shock. Things should sort of flow out of the individual fan, not be forced through scheming. And the ones that are produced that way will not be remembered... at least not favourably. Fans of course change their interests in

the course of their fanatic (at least most seem to) so a change in interests that is for real and not forced has the chance of producing memorable fanatic. So: “Be what you want to be, do what you want to do, before reality stamps you out.”

Bons Mots and Escapades

A compilation of some of Gannetfandom's worst and weirdest moments

John Piggott, Thom Penman, Ian Williams, Dave Cockfield, Kevin Williams, Henry Pijohn; art by Harry Bell

John Piggott, "I Spent My Birthday at Chester and Lived: a saga of wine and water". *The Turning Worm 3* (ed. John Piggott), 1973:

(On the Saturday night) Gannet fandom went to bed. Shortly after, however, the film programme ended and the party swelled again to its former proportions. Ian Williams and I returned to it. From time to time Presford and Penman disrupted the proceedings by blasting water guns (blasphemously labelled "Ethil the Frogs"), but apart from this drag the whole thing was pleasant enough. We left eventually and returned to our room, waking up Maule in the process.

There were a few drops of blood on Ian's pillow, and he told us gleefully how Penman had hit him on the head with a brown ale bottle. Fortunately, the bottle had been empty at the time. Ian considered this bloodbath to be a fannish achievement second only to having had his arm round a married woman.

In the morning nobody seemed willing to get up (well, after all, it was Sunday), Williams being tired after his excesses of the previous night and the other three just being phlegmatic. I managed to get Williams up, though, by letting down his airbed, and he struggled to his feet, standing inside his sleeping bag and holding it up to his chest in order to hide the flab private parts of his anatomy. He jumped about like some kid in a sack race for a while, but I tired of this game and pulled the bag off him. Ian stood revealed in his full glory, if you can call it that, and there was a general rushing towards cameras. But Ian grabbed a copy of *Vector* in time to save his reputation.

– *John Piggott*

[Still from Chessmancon, here is Thom Penman, in an extract also featuring the water pistols. He and Pete Presford were guarding their room party:]

Thom Penman, “King Kon” (Chessmancon report extract), April 1973:

Before the carnage began I sought a fortified position on one of the beds. Sitting with my back propped up against the headboard, legs stretched out on the bed, it was an incredibly comfortable position to soak your head in. By my side I had my fully-primed zot-gun, in a plastic bag so the bed wouldn't get damp.

Presford slumped in similar fashion on either the other bed or the starboard side of the same one, soaking the bedding with his Ethel-the-Phrog. The beds were almost exactly facing the door, which was advantageous as it meant, after the Party had reached its optimum size, or for any other good excuse, whenever familiar figures of fans appeared in the doorway, Presford and I would take it in turns to dissuade the drunks, dwarfs, dissolute, degenerates, *persistent* poor punks, or downrightly *drunken* debauchers staggered, uncomprehending, as ones incapable of their own distress, about in the localised rain-shower, both of us would join fire to drive them off. Such was the case with Brosnan and Kettle. They had, I believe, made one or two attempts to re-enter the party, when bulging-brains busman Brosnan begat a bloody brilliant bright idea (blast the bearded bugger). Appearing, unabashed and unpenitent behind an unfurled unlicensed umbrella, he slowly advanced into the room, being pushed on from behind by a similarly crouching Kettle. Foiled again....

The facts of the matter are no longer clear to me, but Umbrella Fandom's escapades were not entirely successful: somehow Brosnan ended up with an inverted umbrella (well, he *is* Australian...). This black manifestation, not entirely to his wishes I suspect, received rather rough handling during the party, what with people kicking it, hitting each other with it, 'n' all. Its slow transformation from the merely inverted (incredibly funny though it looked, sticking shock upright in the air) to the completely busted, disjointed and broken, was somehow strangely poignant. Kettle took to carrying it, and waving it about. As he carried it, slung on his shoulder like a rifle, it looked like some monster black spiderbat, speared by a sword-stick. From the way it spasmodically jerked and clattered, lose black-webbed spars falling from one tangled spastic position to another, it didn't look completely dead, either. Presford mentioned to me while Kettle carried it draped over his shoulder, that he'd pissed on it while he was trying to hide in the bathroom.

Whether this tale was true or not is impossible to say, enough beer having been spilt on it, and Presford being, well....

– *Thom Penman*

[Not all of us were entirely dissolute, though. Three of us were collecting registration money at Ompacon, the '73 Bristol Eastercon, after we had won the right to put on the '74 Eastercon as Tynecon '74:]

Ian Williams, Ompacon report. Siddhartha 2 (ed. Ian Williams), May 1973:

Rob Jackson, Ian Maule and I had been collecting registration money. Pickersgill had been sitting degenerately nearby for some time when he got to his feet and shuffled/slithered over to me. “You know, I’ve been sitting here for half an hour and not once have I heard you, any of you, say ‘fuck.’ What’s the matter? Live a little.”

Morals are in the minds of the beholders so I refuse to point any out.

– *Ian Williams*

[But we did think about what we were doing in fanzines. Here’s Ian again:]

Ian Williams, Ompacon report. Siddhartha 2 (ed. Ian Williams), May 1973:

Like the last issue, this is all being typed directly onto stencil with only a minimum of thought behind it. Or is that stating the obvious?

“The thing about your fanwriting,” said John Brosnan to me, “is that it gives the impression of having a lot of thought and effort behind it.”

I laughed. “But it’s all first draft.”

“Isn’t everybody’s?” said Roy Kettle.

“Gray Boak did a second draft of a column for *Maya 3*,” I said. Kettle sniggered.

I often wonder if Walt Willis or Bob Shaw ever wrote more than one draft of a piece for a fanzine. I suspect they did, because there’s little fanwriting I see these days that couldn’t be improved by a second draft – my own included, especially my own.

– *Ian Williams*

[As time went on our pleasures became in general a bit milder and gentler:]

Dave Cockfield, editorial, Atropos 4 (ed. Dave Cockfield), July 1978:

Robert Sheckley is one of the greats in the sf world and the Gannets arranged for him to speak to the North East SF Group. Rob Jackson made the arrangements with his normal competence. Robert (from now on to be referred to as Bob) was to be met at Newcastle railway station one hour before he was due to talk so Rob and I went to meet the train. In case we failed to recognise Bob, Rob had arranged to carry a copy of *Analog* so he would at least be able to identify us.

The train arrived with no famous author aboard, as did the second. Rob by this time was becoming very agitated, waving his magazine in front of every face he encountered. We began to worry that we had missed him and he had also missed us. It was possible that Bob was wandering around Newcastle looking for some nut waving a copy of *Analog* in the air as opposed to a nut dementedly brandishing a copy of *Galaxy*. Rob had been unable to find a copy of *Analog* in the house.

The meeting was well overdue by this time and a phone call to Bob's wife raised fears that he had fallen asleep on the train and was, at that moment, speeding onwards to the end of the world, Edinburgh. Apparently such occurrences were commonplace in the Sheckley household. Feeling very worried and apprehensive, it was a great relief to us when Bob finally arrived on the next train. For once British Rail was not to blame but the infamous London traffic. That's what happens when you can afford to travel by taxi.

Bob turned out to be a pleasant, mild mannered man, full of gentle humour. In fact he could well be the American answer to Bob Shaw if he was prepared to gain a few dozen inches around the waist, drink gallons of alcohol, and allow Rob Jackson to lick his boots occasionally while he's begging for articles to grace the greatest periodical since *Boy's Own*. His talk was a great success and he was persuaded to visit the Roman Wall with the Gannets the next day.

– *Dave Cockfield*

Kevin Williams and Henry Pijohn, "The Bionic Fan – An Extrapolation". *Bland* (eds. Kevin Williams & Henry Pijohn), 1976

(Extract from the NESFiG Newsletter, no. 26, Spring 1982....)

.... And now for news of the core and founding NESFiG members. Dave Cockfield has still not recovered from his coma yet, I'm afraid. We all advised him not to go to that Swedish con alone. With no one to talk to but

himself, such an occurrence was inevitable. Harry has almost finished the ceiling of Durham Cathedral, and the first illustrated edition of *Portnoy's Complaint*, which he was working on concurrently, and has left him feeling plumb tuckered-out.

Our next meeting should prove a bit of a red-letter day for Ian Williams, as the group will be showing the film of his bestselling novel (his first), *Rider on a Stone Horse*, starring, of course, Roger Moore as the stone and Charlton Heston as the horse.

But it is of one of the original founder members and primary driving forces of the group, that I bring the most surprising news. The group's only VBNBIHUCMCSMTP – fan (Very Big Name But Incredibly Hard Up 'Cos *Maya* Costs so Much To Produce – fan), Rob Jackson (it's not very surprising with the prices monks charge these days. I mean, who needs every other word to be graphically illustrated, anyway?) was the victim of a serious road accident. Riding home from the *Grotty Pint* (where we hold our weekly meetings) last week, he was involved in a collision between his moped and a 32-tonne, 6-trailer articulated juggernaut. Miraculously he survived the encounter, but after his fellow surgeons had separated him from the wreckage of his machine, they were forced to make certain key amputations. However, thanks to the recent miraculous advances in techniques of surgical prosthesis and Bionic Engineering, Rob is now back with us, virtually unchanged. Apart from having to carry a bag around with him at all times (it contains his power-pack and life-support systems), having to speak rather faster than anyone can follow and faulty relays causing the occasional rapid clicking of the fingers, his bionic head and arms can be really useful things. No Gannetfan need ever worry about the repro of his latest ish – we just plug Rob into the Roneo, and within twenty minutes, 150 copies will have been produced, collated, stapled, folded and addressed. With a suitable adaptor he is able to work Gestetners as well.



*– Kevin Williams and Henry Pijohn
– Art by Harry Bell*

Once Upon A Tyne

Bob Shaw

Previously published in *Maya* 7, ed. Rob Jackson, February 1975

Original art by Harry Bell

Does this happen to other fans? I look forward to a convention for six months and am quite keyed up on the journey to it – but as soon as the hotel comes into view I'm gripped by an inexplicable timidity and get an urge to turn around and go home again. This effect was more apparent than ever on arriving at the Royal Station Hotel in Newcastle for the Tynecon, perhaps because I was Guest of Honour and wasn't sure how a GoH should disport himself.

Another source of concern was that I wasn't completely myself. I have never been what one would call willowy or lissome in build, and towards the end of 1973 had been progressing from being burly to being downright fat. This prompted me to go on a diet on which I lost over 40 lb. The position, therefore, was that the Tynecon committee had invited the full-scale Bob Shaw to be GoH – and only three-quarters of me was showing up!

As it transpired, my whittled-down appearance triggered off a kind of dieting chain reaction in the British SF world which – in terms of weight alone – reduced our ranks by the equivalent of one good-sized fan. It became noticeable at the Novacon six months later, an affair which reminded me of that Dick or Sheckley story in which people could equip themselves with bodies of their own choice. Peter Nicholls showed up in a late-model Tony Curtis; John Steward, formerly built like two football players, appeared wearing a natty Anthony Perkins; and the biggest transformation of all was in Jim Goddard, always invaluable as a landmark (“The bar? Yes, it's over there behind Jim Goddard.”), who walked in dressed in a nifty Robert Redford. Quite literally, nobody knew who he was!

They all said they had been inspired by me, so I guess I can claim to have improved the health of U.K. fandom, but I keep thinking about our “lost” fan and the fanzines he might one day have produced. But then, perhaps he is happily at work organising a separate fandom in a limbo world inhabited by all the humanity which has vanished from the face of the earth

since Calorie-counting came into vogue. You can visualise them – jolly little round hominids composed entirely of banished fat – bouncing all over the place at their own little worldcons. They would be carefree creatures except that, presumably, when a person backslides on his diet and begins putting on weight again his counterpart in Fatland would begin to shrink. The word would soon go round – “Smithers is getting smaller, being recalled to his maker, looks like he’ll never finish stencilling his second Issue.” So, if you have lost weight and feel tempted to go back onto apple pie and cream, just remember you could be depriving a cuddly little cherub of his chance to win a Hugo.

Another weird thing about the Novacon was that Nudist Radish Squashing Competition held in secret on the Sunday morning. I was going to give the names of the three BNFs who won it, but this is an article about the Tynecon so those revelations will have to wait.

It is almost impossible to write a con report unless you have made notes at the time, but one event, or non-event, burned into my memory is the affair of my GoH speech on the Saturday evening. I was due to speak at 8.00 and previous to that was having dinner with a publisher, with a taxi calling for us at 6.00. At first it all seemed very easy, then a panel discussion with Brian Aldiss and Peter Nicholls – who were also eating with us – overran its time, and our schedule began to slip. Then the taxi failed to show up, and we found ourselves setting out on foot at 7.00. It was a good restaurant, with a leisurely service intended to give customers maximum opportunity to savour the fine food and wine, but I was perched unhappily on the edge of the seat fretting and sweating about the time, wondering if I dared make a discreet exit after the soup.

A waiter advised me which dishes would be ready soonest, and – being a vegetarian – I chose venison. This perhaps requires some explanation. You see, I happen to believe that all these reports we hear about vegetables having emotions, and being able to feel pain, are perfectly true, and – as a creature like a lettuce has never done anybody any harm – I feel the only humanitarian thing to do is to be a meat-eater. Unfortunately, the venison took quite a long time to arrive, so I explained to the company that I would have to scoff it down and leave immediately afterwards. They nodded understandingly. I popped a piece of meat into my mouth, gnashed down on it with great force, and promptly discovered the second reason I shouldn’t have ordered venison.

There was a piece of lead shot in the piece I had chosen, and it drove its

way through a filling in a rear tooth like a ricochet from an Armalite rifle.

Now, there are pains and there are pains. There's the pain from a corn, which causes you to wince and manfully carry on; there's the pain of indigestion, which makes you writhe around a little; and there's the pain of a headache, which makes you look wan and thoughtful. The correct natural response to this pain would have been to emit a piercing shriek and fall to the floor with both hands clapped to the mouth.

At the moment it came, however, my host was leaning across the table telling me a joke, and there was the added complication that if I revealed what had happened he, being a very gentlemanly person, would probably have called the management on my behalf and I would have been later than ever for the speech. So I sat perfectly still, and smiled at the joke, and all the while I could feel each individual pore on my face opening and expelling a bead of cold sweat. This produced a curious secondary agony, rather like having a needle-spiked cylinder rolled across the forehead and cheeks, but I didn't mind because it helped divert my attention from the dental Hiroshima within.

When the power of controlled movement returned I swallowed the rest of the venison in whole chunks, just the way it was served, mumbled apologies and fled downstairs to the street. It was bitterly cold in Newcastle that night and the first gust of North Sea air triggered off the damaged tooth again. Into the bargain, I then realised I wasn't too sure of my way back to the hotel. I ran off up the hill, lop-sided, nursing my jaw and moaning like a wounded wolfman, alternately praying and swearing, trying to think up a few off-the-cuff opening witticisms for my speech, and taking every wrong turning possible. If a prowler had glimpsed me in the darkness the entire Newcastle Constabulary would have been issued with revolvers and silver bullets; but, finally, I reached the Royal Station, loped up the stairs and encountered Ian Maule, who said:

“No need to panic, Bob – we've postponed you till tomorrow night.”

So far in this report there hasn't been much said about the convention programme. It was a helluva good programme, with lots of entertaining items, but knowledge of it is already in the public domain, and I'm too late for that sort of report anyway. So the next item is an account of the first room party ever given by the Shaws.

I've been attending conventions for over twenty years on and off, and love room parties, but somehow it had never before occurred to me to act as

host. Sadie and I had a fair-sized room which should have been ample for the purpose, but the word must have got around that I was finally going to pay back some of the booze consumed in two decades of visiting other people's parties.

On the Sunday night our room was so crowded that if you spilt a drink capillary attraction made it go *up!* And there was so much smoke around that the only people who got fresh air were the ones sucking filter cigarettes. I managed to find a comfortable spot by nestling in between the embossings on the wallpaper, and spent the entire night there, trapped.

From this vantage point I didn't see a great deal of what was going on, and consequently was intrigued when – round about 3.00 am – I observed Brian Aldiss shooting up into the air, almost reaching the ceiling, and then sinking back down out of sight. He repeated this feat about a dozen times, gracefully, each time seeming to hang motionless just below the ceiling in defiance of gravity, with a look of beatific contemplation on his face. I grew quite entranced by this spectacle, and therefore felt disappointed when the initially perfect symmetry of his movements decayed into ordinary parabolas and he began colliding with other people and had to abandon his ethereal ballet.



I must admit that for a while my faith in Brian was slightly shaken, but I needn't have worried. The thing that went wrong was that two legs of my bed, which he was using as a trampoline, had proved unequal to his artistry, and the weight of about ten other people, and had gradually folded up, inclining him further and further off course. Given a perfectly horizontal launching pad he could have gone on bouncing on the one spot all night.

When the party ended, about two hours later, Sadie and I collapsed

without even noticing what had happened to the bed. We had that exhausted but happy feeling you get when you know you have hosted a really successful social occasion. Our contented glow lasted until we got up next morning with splitting headaches caused by breathing an atmosphere similar to the aftermath of a fire in a used clothing dump. All around the crippled bed were heaped up drifts of cigarette ends, beer cans, bottles, glasses, biscuit crumbs, cigar wrappers, lost fanzines, peanuts and quote cards. I was still hunting for my shoes when a cleaning lady opened the door. She stopped on the threshold, looked around, and backed away shaking her head.

I waved at her. “Don’t mind us – you can tidy up now if you want.”

She fled down the corridor and came back with two others. All three examined the room in silence, retired to the corridor, held some kind of a union meeting, then went away and returned with the hotel manager.

“Sorry about all this,” I said. “We had a few friends in last night.”

He nodded. “That’s all right, sir. If you would like to take your luggage down to the lobby we’ll try to clear up.”

“Oh, but we’re not leaving,” I told him. “We’re staying an extra day. For a party.”

The blood drained out of his face so quickly that hundreds of corpuscles must have been killed in the rush, but, to give that manager credit, when he learned the party was in Rob Jackson’s house and not in his hotel he became quite affable. While we were being moved to another room he told us that four other beds had been wrecked on the same night, and thus he unwittingly solved a problem that had been perplexing me for some time. Lots of good conventions linger in the memory, so what was needed was a good objective and qualitative assessment of their excellence. Something similar to the star system the AA uses for hotels.

Now we have our rating system. And the Tynecon – probably the first “five-bed” convention – must be at the top of the charts.

What Did You Do at Newcastle '74, Daddy? Graham and Pat Charnock

**Or: What are friends for if you can't piss on
them.**

First published in *Wrinkled Shrew* 1, eds. Graham & Pat Charnock, July 1974

What follows is far too fragmentary to be called a con report. It's certainly more fragmentary than I wanted to make it – a common fault with me these days when so often ambition exceeds ability and perseverance. The first part of what follows was written immediately following my return from Newcastle. It covers the first day. By the time I'd written it I became aware that the whole process of recall, dissection, rationalisation and justification demonstrated therein wasn't doing either me or the writing any good. I decided to leave it a month or so to see what happened. Of course, nothing happened. So... I come back to it now to tidy things up, to waste not want not, and make the best of a bad job. Perhaps I should never have taken the whole thing so seriously...

MESSAGE BEGINS

Let one thing be said: we went to the convention, Pat and I, as Ratfans. We went in the company of Ratfan masters and acolytes such as Greg Pickersgill, Roy Kettle, Peter Roberts, Rich Coad, Ritchie Smith, and were proud to do so. This is not to excuse but to justify certain snide/bitchy comments on various Rats which must, inevitably I somehow feel, interlard this report. It takes a Rat to criticise a Rat. Regrettably, it may even take a Rat to understand such criticisms. If you're bored, skip it. Pass the tuna.

We assembled at Kings Cross. London stations these days look more like office blocks than anything else and long-distance travel is about as exciting as a ride in an elevator. Suffice to say that despite setbacks such as noisy Scottish neighbours and long queues for drinks, we managed to sustain a certain level of hysteria all the way to Newcastle. No mean feat.

Newcastle looked great fun from the train. Except that it wasn't Newcastle – it was Durham, all murk and mizzle at that dreary time of the day when all sensible people are indoors watching *Nationwide*.

Kettle, proving what has often been disputed, that he has some kind of soul, said it reminded him of the Eleanor Rigby sequence in *Yellow Submarine*. I could see what he meant. The mist shrouded all detail, rendered everything in simple foreground/middle distance/background like a theatrical set. Newcastle itself was an anti-climax, redeemed only by the Georgian sweep of Grey Street. But they're pulling Newcastle down slowly, just like London, replacing the existing with buildings that will remain habitable for fifty years (perhaps) and then prove impossible to demolish.

Not that we saw a great deal of the city itself, or needed to. A master-stroke on the part of the committee to produce the first almost-hermetic convention, where you could get off the train, walk to the hotel, register, eat, drink, and be reasonably merry, and never once need to see the daylight.

At this stage some fashion notes from Pat...

I was pleasantly surprised by the eclecticism of this year's fannish fashions. I can only recall one fan who wore the same outfit every day and that particular person was a Ratfan master in whom it was excusable.

I was lucky to be able to reserve a seat on the main fannish train to Newcastle which carried such celebrities as Mr Robert Holdstock who was surprisingly cheerful in view of the fact that his wife had just left him. But apparently he was consoling himself with Andrew Stephenson.

Also on the train were the Blishes who were, as always, dressed in the best of taste. I shared a carriage with the Ratfan Masters and Buddies amongst whom denim proliferated. Peter Roberts wore a delightful two-tone grey brushed-denim suit with blue denim vegetarian boots; would be Rat Ritchie Smith was attired in dark blue denim with a light blue shirt; Master Roy Kettle and Buddy Rich Coad wore brushed denim trousers (a pair each); Master Charnock, obviously in collaboration, wore a printed denim jacket and, having been forewarned, I wore jeans and a Levi shirt. The only exception to this charming uniform was the sartorial splendour of Ace Master Greg Pickersgill who wore, for the journey and through the on, his usual dung-coloured outfit with suede jacket and boots to match. I was pleased to note, however, that he no longer wears open-crotch trousers. He was, of

course, sporting his badge-carrier, nosewiper and hider of embarrassment – the perpetual black and red scarf.

MESSAGE CONTINUES

We arrived on Thursday. The programme didn't start till Friday so there was nothing to do but sit around and drink. We sat around and drank. Thom Penman joined us and seemed almost sensible except when he opened his mouth. Malcolm and Christine Edwards, always sensible, pulled up a chair (each) and remained surprisingly unparanoid in the face of feeble Ratfan retorts about being bourgeois middle-class empire-builders. Chris Priest, who's been through all that and should know better, confessed that conventions usually make *him* feel paranoid but that he had arrived at some beatific acceptance of his midway status as fan/writer and was now almost placid. On the contrary, he found Ratfandom the most paranoid group around. I had to agree with him.

Greg Pickersgill is an arch example of the Ratfan paranoiac. Believing ninety percent of fandom to be mainly cretinous he is morbidly afraid of being counted among them. A case if ever there was of being terrified that other people will see him as he sees them. Roy Kettle shares a lot of this attitude but refuses to take fandom as seriously as Greg and so remains immune to the worst symptoms of paranoia. John Brosnan, noticeable by his absence at the convention, has learnt to live with paranoia by accepting it and caricaturing it. Rich Coad, American agent for Ratfandom, being incredibly young, hasn't yet had to live with it. As for myself, I have my own reasons for being paranoid (a failure at twenty-seven, huh) which have little to do with fandom but is probably a major reason I empathise with the rattish element in fandom more than any other.

Sometime that evening Pat and I went out to find a bed for the night and a meal. We ended up at the Ying-King. I think we must have been the first to discover this fairly cheap and friendly Chinese restaurant and the only one we could find open at that dead time of the day.

I was pretty dead myself. Journeying across England's time-zones with Ratfandom, walking a tightrope between hysteria and bland insouciance, has exhausted me totally. But we went back to the hotel and drank and talked some more before, at about eleven o'clock, exhaustion proved too much. But I wasn't too tired to notice, as we walked to our hotel, that the starlings that

perpetually cluster around the eaves and parapets of Newcastle seemed to be holding a convention of their own, with everything that typifies a good sf convention: running fights in the air, birdshit from above, cosy snug snuggling amongst themselves, the feeling of being on the ledge itself, and the constant din of chatter. So it goes. I dreamt of guns that night. I don't know why.

MESSAGE ENDS

Some more fashion notes from Pat...

By Friday some of the more expensive people had arrived at the convention. Christopher Priest, for whom Botticelli of Crimpers had designed a marvellous new hair style, was sporting his velvet smoking jacket of indeterminate hue. His escort was small in dark blue denim waistcoat, long skirt and sketching pad with ball point pen attached. Promaster Mr Brian Aldiss wore his comfortable old brown corduroy jacket. In anticipation of being asked to read his poems in public at the infamous poetry soiree, would-be Rat Ritchie Smith wore a blue three-piece suit with umbrella and briefcase. However, as it became apparent that he would not be called upon to appear he gradually stripped off first the waistcoat, then the jacket, then the umbrella was discarded. Finally he appeared in black corduroy jeans with the ubiquitous blue shirt and an uncouth wide leather belt holding up his paunch, a sad sight in one so young. For the poetry reading, John Neilsen Hall flew in from London dressed in unrelieved black from head to foot – even his fingernails were painted in the same sombre hue. He has lost a lot of weight – we hope to be able to run details of his diet sheet in the next edition of *Shrew*.

It was a joy to attend the Disco on Saturday night and wallow in the fantastic creations that so many fans had indulged in. Rob Holdstock sported a tin suit with a mask – I gather it had taken three people two hours to bolt him into the slimline jacket. Anne McCaffrey swirled around in black leotard and tights with a wide cloak and beautifully green eyeshadow and foundation. Arthur Cruttenden was cuddly in a fur coat with fake fur trousers, feet, and mittens. He also wore a tail, which seemed to be quite the thing this year. [*1] When she was dressed, Simone Walsh wore a charming long blue dress with lurex thread. But... the prevailing fashion theme still seemed to be denim although a quantity of corduroy was observed. Not many female legs were obvious – most women seeming to prefer long skirts or slacks. However

one pair of rather passé hot pants was sported and I did observe one female in a rabbit-fur mini-skirt. It seemed a shame so many people attended the disco and yet so few actually danced.

ODDS AND SODS (MOSTLY SODS)

So what about the con in general. Generally, I enjoyed it. The hotel was large, the staff kept out of your way. The bar stayed open long into the night and the early hours of the morning. The prices were pricey and variable, but the barman in the main con bar at least gave the impression he cared about the drinks he was serving. The committee were friendly and diligent. I still have a conscience about telling a harassed Ian Williams jokingly to sod off. I'm surprised he didn't hit me.

I never was in the habit of taking a camera to conventions, but if I had these are a few of the things I wish I'd photographed: Ritchie Smith's attempt to seduce two women at one time, one of them being my wife; the moment when the Dracula dj at the disco arose from his coffin amid flashing lights... to be confronted by a bored disinterested audience of about three people; Chris Priest legging it down the hotel corridor with my wife on his back (she certainly gets about); the hotel manager's face when Roy Kettle confessed to breaking his duplicator; Ian Watson pissing in Brian Aldiss's beer when his back was turned.

COVENTRY IN '75

Of course, it was all my fault. I happened to pick up a rival flyer and in a moment of boredom substituted an alternative committee. Greg Pickersgill smacked his forehead dramatically, fell over and said in a slurred voice: "Why didn't I think of that!" Roy Kettle couldn't contain his enthusiasm – he had to be woken up. Christ Priest offered a number of sage and considered comments such as "Can I be Guest of Honour." Malcolm Edwards simply sat there with a wry smile on his face knowing this was his moment of glory so long as he did nothing, absolutely nothing. Peter Roberts offered to be Treasurer and began quietly leafing through a nearby IBM Selectric catalogue. And Pat and I left on Sunday morning never believing anything would come of it.

Whether anything will come of it remains to be seen. [*2]

Editorial footnotes, 2015:

*[*1] Rob Holdstock's, Anne McCaffrey's and Arthur Cruttenden's costumes were all part of Jim and Judy Blish's To Oz mini-Wizard of Oz play, staged as part of the Fancy Dress.*

*[*2] It did – the Rat group ran the next Eastercon, Seacon 75.*

Star Filler

Roy Kettle, *True Rat 9* (ed. Roy Kettle), April 1977

Until I met Rob Jackson I thought justifying margins meant acknowledging that the staples had to go *somewhere*.

Tales from the Grimling Bosch

Harry Bell

Published in *The Grimling Bosch* 1 (June 1973), 3 (April 1975), 4 (October 1975) & 5 (March 1976), ed. Harry Bell
Original art by Richard Loughton

1: The Pirouette

Gannetfandom, I'm given to understand, differs from most of the other large fan groups in the country by meeting regularly and often. While other groups get together maybe once a fortnight or even once a month, some, if not all of Gannetfandom's hard core see each other every Tuesday of the year – at the Gannet, of course – while Ian Maule, Henry Pijohn, Rob Jackson and I meet at the “Post Office” in Newcastle on quite a few Friday nights of the year. Before we took on the job of organising next year's Eastercon (have you paid *your* 50p registration yet?) we would, on occasion, congregate at Ian Williams's place on Saturday nights; now that five of us constitute the Tynecon '74 committee, Saturday night at Ian's has become almost obligatory, if only to make sure everyone is doing what they ought to be doing and avoid duplication of effort.

Parties figure fairly largely in the Gannet calendar, although Gannet parties as such really tend to be extensions of Tuesday nights only on a Saturday, if you see what I mean. The obvious difference is that, as the parties are held in one or another of the houses available to us, we can play records, drink and talk on a much more intimate level than at the Gannet, well into the small or even large hours of the morning.

Unfortunately, one of the less desirable characteristics of a Gannet party is the tendency for it to deteriorate now and again into a verbal set-to between two or more Gannets. In the past, Ian Maule has had his personality systematically laid bare and demolished and Thom Penman and I have, strangely, had what amounted to an hour-long argument over why we wouldn't decorate each other's (non-existent) flat. Luckily, the effects of these altercations never carry over to the next day; nevertheless, it came as a

pleasant change when, about a month ago, we had a party completely free from bovvver.

Rob, Henry, Ians Williams and Maule were to assemble at Rob's parents' house, and Irene and I were to join them there for what was officially a *Maya 6* duplicating party. Clutching a bottle of Barsac and a bottle of red wine between us, Irene and I turned up at the house to find the rest well into several bottles of Lindisfarne mead, a four pint can of beer, and a flagon of Maule's home-made Burgundy.

One of Maule's electrostencils had developed a crease and this had been seized upon as an excuse to abandon the duplicating party and turn it into a *real* party.

I think it's fair to say it was an all-round success. Rob had set up the table tennis table in the kitchen (the boiler for the central heating is in the kitchen; we sweated like proverbial pigs, and Ian Williams wasted away to an elephant), a small billiard table in the dining room, and a succession of ping-pong and snooker leagues developed. Henry proved himself abysmally bad at table tennis, being beaten by both Irene and me, neither of us noted for our ping-pong prowess. He redeemed himself by defeating Ian Williams at snooker, although it should be admitted that the goblin's reactions had been progressively deteriorating under the influence of mead.

I'm sure the presence of the games kept this party a fun thing and stopped the conversation from turning to heavier subjects. As Henry said later, "fanzines and fandom were almost never mentioned."

The party eventually ran itself down after such notable incidents as Williams pretending to be sick when we attempted to remove his pants as a punishment for attacking Irene, and Ian Maule having his shoes and socks taken away (as a prelude to an unsuccessful de-bagging attempt) for over-exposure of his recently acquired hairy pot-belly.

"Beer pot," says Maule.

"Hah!" we say, after weeks of watching him sip Coke at the Gannet.

Perhaps the hit of the evening was Rob, well pissed on his mead, my wine, Ian's wine, and Henry's bheer, twirling round the room on his toes, arms above his head, with Williams a bouncing satellite in orbit around him, both of them singing along to a Creedence Clearwater Revival LP. I was reminded quite strongly of the Dance of the Hippopotamus from *Fantasia*.

Next morning Rob was heard to remark, "I have to keep stopping to feel dizzy."

2: The Dispossessed (or, The End of the Gannet)

A seemingly ordinary night at the Gannet, the time around 10.35. In our usual corner Irene and I and the assembled might of Gannetfandom talk, laugh and drink but generally behave ourselves. Scattered round the room, a few isolated couples take their time over a final drink or a far from final kiss.

The Manager asks the room in general to drink up and we begin to do so; someone comments on how late it is and how he had not heard the bell for time.

“Oh, it definitely rang,” I said.

The words were hardly out of my beer-glass when a voice barked, “I want no comments about the way I run my pub!” The Manager this was, his bow tie a-quiver.

I began to protest, but like God with a spare tablet of stone he pronounced his Commandment: “You are barred from the premises!”

“But we’ve been coming here every Tuesday night for three years.”

“Yes, and in all that time you haven’t thanked me once.”

There was one of those split-second pauses that occur when someone – usually Henry – says something irrational, then: “But you’re here to provide a service.”

This was a dubious point from Irene because in all the time this guy had been landlord of the Gannet we’d never seen him serve behind the bar. He’s one of those who believes his job is to sit on this side of the bar boozing with his mates.

“I am not here to provide a service – this is my *house*,” roared the Manager, his equilibrium now noticeably impaired.

“It’s a *public* house,” we chorused.

“It’s not a public house and I don’t want private clubs in here.”

“We’re not a private club, we’re a social group, and you or anyone else is welcome to come and talk to us.”

“I don’t want to come and talk to you,” he said and did a somewhat theatrical about turn so that his back was towards us. We kept asking what the hell we’d done to deserve all this, but he declared the subject closed. Rob Jackson has a tendency to try to placate in such circumstances and he now adopted his most “reasonable” voice (guaranteed to turn your stomach) and with an “Oh, look...” touched the Manager’s elbow.

The Manager swung round with a look that said “Assault me, would you?” and in the corner of my eye Dave Bendelow moved forward, almost imperceptibly, but enough to tell me he was prepared to put the Manager on his back.

“For ghod’s sake let’s go,” I said. “He’s obviously pissed.”

“Yes,” he said. “I’ve probably had more to drink tonight than you have the whole year!”

We walked up the corridor in something of a daze. As we climbed the stairs we took with us his parting shot: “And I bet you’re all living off the country!”

Downstairs in the lounge, scattered round the room, a few isolated couples resumed taking their time over their drinks and started in again on that not so final kiss.

That was a year ago, 2 March 1974, and I felt the story was worth recounting in full to mark the first anniversary of our move to Sunderland Arts Centre. Actually, that wasn’t quite the full story. Now and again Gannetfandom is sufficiently moved to do something positive, and that night Kev Williams, Rob Jackson and I wrote letters of complaint to Vaux Breweries, the owners of the Gannet.

Although we got no real satisfaction from the Brewery who obviously were reluctant to agree that they employed a pillock as manager of one of their pubs, we were rather gratified when someone told us a couple of weeks later that Our Friend the Manager was now in charge of the White Horse, a tiny pub in an out of the way pit-village and a far cry from the trendy night-life of Sunderland.

Actually, I suppose half the trouble is that pub landlords just don’t know how to categorise Gannetfandom. Apart from an Australian who ran the Gannet for a while and who would talk to us and pick up fanzines, all the managers there eyed us with suspicion. In a pub whose normal clientele consists of young couples, trendies, skins, and the occasional stag-party passing through, a group of fifteen or so very assorted people passing round books and fanzines every Tuesday must stick out like a sore thumb.

Because of overcrowding and unscheduled poetry events we had to leave Sunderland Arts Centre and now meet in the Imperial Vaults, a quiet comfortable pub down a dark seedy Sunderland alley. And the landlord has

started to give us rather odd looks.

3: The Great Expedition

Regular readers of this not very regular fanzine will remember that it is the policy of Gannetfandom in the assorted persons of Rob Jackson, the Ians Maule, Williams and Penman, Irene and me to spend Bank Holidays at Rob's parents' cottage in the Lake District; climbing, drinking and generally having a good time are the order of the day on such occasions.

Last Whit Bank Holiday we went to the Lakes again. The trip was a failure.

The week before we went I was beginning to have premonitions of a disaster. More and more people were being invited and it began to seem to me that, given Gannetfandom's innate lack of organisation, ten was going to prove to be too many.

Richard Loughton, Irene and I left Friday night with Rob in his car: up the Tyne Valley on the south side, then through Staward Pele to Alston and over Hartside to Fell Gate, the Jacksons' country retreat.

After shoving a chicken in the oven we showed Richard around. It was one of the better sights of the weekend watching him run up and down the grassy banks bordering the road, looking at wild flowers, talking to the sheep through gaps in the hawthorn hedge, and almost doing an autopsy on a dead crow (the "pterodactyl" in his map) strung up on the fence. Does that make Rich sound like some kind of loony? It wasn't meant to. I always find being in the country has that kind of effect on me on first leaving the city and I guess we all acted pretty child-like as we wandered about outside the cottage.

The Ians Penman and Williams arrived by car a little later and it wasn't too long before the six of us were drinking in the little pub at Gamblesby. Occasionally, between, or even during pints someone would recall the chicken waiting for us in the oven, but get a Gannet in a pub and you don't readily get him out before closing time. So it was quite late, what with the convivial pub atmosphere, and the bheer, and the relaxed drinking hours, and the bumpy drive back through black country lanes, before we sat down to our chicken. But by ghod, that chicken tasted good!

And so to bed.

Saturday morning, breakfast of cornflakes, bacon and eggs and coffee over, we flipped through old copies of *Punch* and talked over what we might

do with the rest of the weekend. We knew Kev Williams and Josh Rawlings had some intention of climbing Saddleback and although the rest of us weren't feeling too energetic we thought we might get in a little walking and maybe some rowing on Windermere.

But it was while we were washing dishes and hair and stuff that the Plan began to fall apart. Kev, Josh, Henry Pijohn and Ian Maule arrived and a game of hot, sweaty football broke out. Now, hot, sweaty football has one inevitable outcome – a thirst-quenching trip to the pub. Maule, Josh, Henry and the Williamses Kev and Ian were soon barrelling down country lanes in Josh's car, Gamblesby-bound.

It happened so quickly that it was maybe a quarter of an hour before Rich, Rob, Irene and I came out of our daze and asked each other: "What do we do with the Plan now?" To the pub, we decided, and entice the others with glowing tales of mountain pathways through rocky slopes in God's Open Air.

It didn't work, of course. When we got to the pub it contained no one but a crowd of very noisy, happy Gannets engrossed in a furious, if inaccurate game of darts. What we should have done, there and then, was to say, "Right, when you've finished your pints we'll go and *do* something." What we did instead – and this is much more in character than saying "Right, when you've finished your pints we'll go and *do* something" – we looked out at the sky clouding over, thought about mountain pathways through rocky slopes in God's Open Air (briefly), then bought a round of drinks and joined in the game of darts.

When the pub closed at three we drank up. Then we ordered another round and had another game of darts. And again.

Driving back was probably quite eventful but it's none too clear in my mind. I never realised before how games of darts can blur the mind and dull the senses. Suffice it to say that it is only three miles from Gamblesby to Fell Gate but it took us some three hours to drive that distance, being delayed in part by running over some police bollards and having to cope with Kevin and Henry sitting on the bonnet.

Hangovers and gloom set in, with people sniping at one another. Sunday wasn't a great deal better, although a little more active. Kevin, Henry and Josh actually got round to climbing Saddleback and the rest of us drove into Wasdale to clamber about the Bowder Stone. Unfortunately, Kevin's party didn't come back for dinner that evening; they had in fact, managed to get lost and spent the remainder of the weekend in Annan, Josh's home.

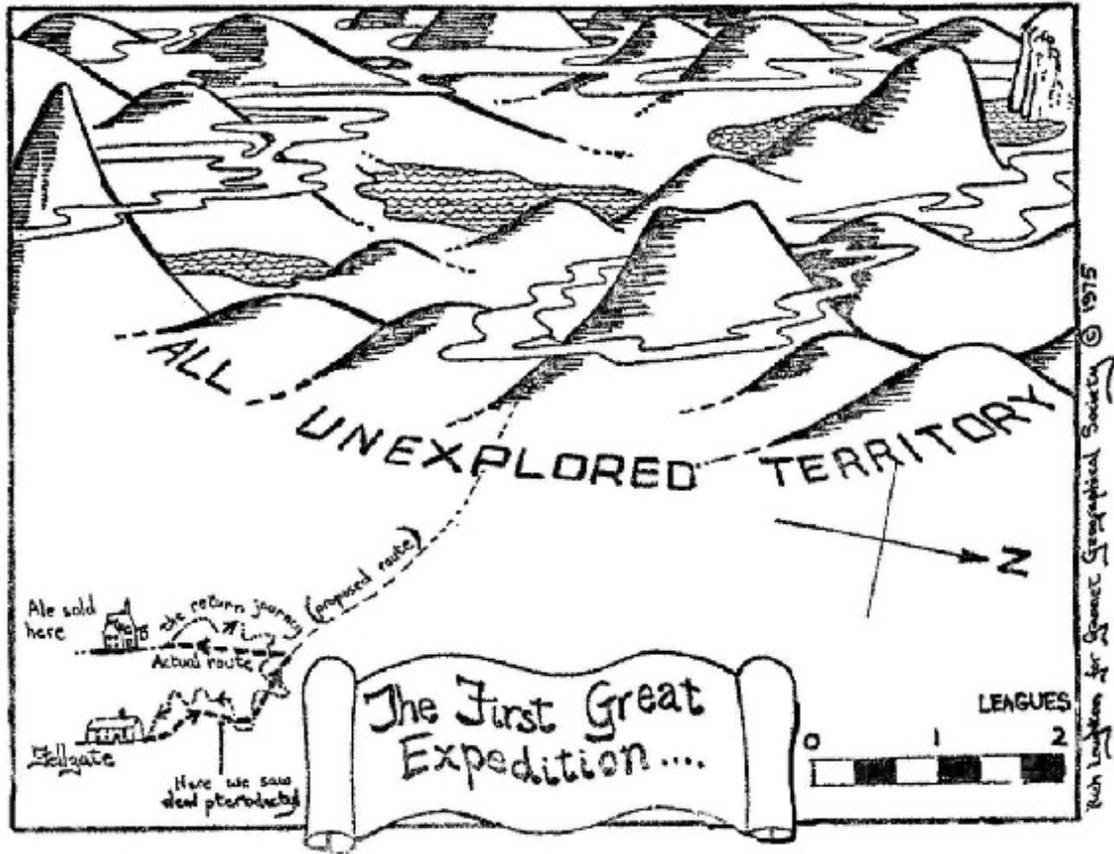
Monday saw us reluctant to just pack up and go home – we felt, I think, that we should make one final effort to make something worthwhile of the trip. Rowing! The sure cure for bad trip blues. A quick drive to Talkin Tarn and we were sitting by the shore of a cold windswept lake waiting for a man to come and empty the water out of his boats. We checked a few out that looked like they might make serviceable submarines, and finally settled on one with a little puddle in the bottom. The five of us climbed in, Ian Williams and I on the rowing seat, Irene, Rob and Richard in the stern, and two miniature Niagaras in the sides.

“Oh dear,” said Richard, ever the one for a witty turn of phrase.

We eventually found a boat that didn’t ship water (boat water?) too alarmingly, but the wind had risen even more and by the time we got out into open water it was blowing so hard we couldn’t row in anything remotely resembling a straight line. Putting a lot of effort into going round in circles is not a particularly edifying pastime. When our hour was up we got in the car and went home.

Putting a lot of physical effort into going round in circles. On reflection, that sums up Gannetfandom rather well.

Well... mental effort, maybe. Effort? Well... we get round to doing things sometimes.



4: The Biltong Cometh

I got a phone call from Rob Jackson the other day.

“I’m sitting in the car outside 9 Lincoln Street with a dog and a duplicator,” he said.

Both Irene and I were putting in a few extra hours at work so there was no one at home to let Rob in with his newly-acquired, second-hand Gestetner 360 electric duplicator complete with three-drawer cabinet. His West Highland Terrier, Ben, was keeping him company but conversation with a Gestetner and a West Highland is limited to some degree.

“You’d better come and pick me up, Rob,” I said, and within a quarter of an hour I was standing outside Central Office looking through the car window at Rob, Ben, and a sprawling mass of mechanical passengers.

“I seem to have overlooked something,” said Rob, getting out. “There’s no room for you.”

Ben jumped out to show canine contempt for things governmental by

peeing up against the Department's gate-post.

"If we can stand the cabinet on end, there'll be room." Rob started to prove his assertion straight away, using the corner of the cabinet to make a hole in the lining of the roof.

"You've made a hole in the lining of the roof, Rob," I said, hoping he wouldn't get Very Cross Indeed. He didn't, but we soon came to the conclusion that the cabinet was just going to have to travel supine and I would have to wedge myself into the remaining foot or so of space, my elbow jammed into the cabinet's base. Ben's peregrinations are an accepted hazard of Jackson Transport, but lodged as I was, his penchant for sniffing between your legs and perching on your shoulder like some overstuffed Cap'n Flint, made the trip... well... uncomfortable.

The attic at 9 Lincoln is quite large and when things are in their place there's room for several people to swing several cats, or pass the same one from hand to hand rapidly, or even play a game of darts (assuming they're prepared to accept the handicap of having the left eye blinded by the light-bulb). However, the recent generous gift of two single beds, crashing fen for the use of, meant the considerable rearrangement of the attic furniture comprising a three-piece suite, three sets of Dexion shelving, a table and two non-serviceable duplicators, and countless boxes of books, fanzines and kipple. I'm not noted for completing mundane jobs in anything remotely resembling a hurry so it was with considerable strength and agility that we adjusted the confused geography of the room to include yet another landmark.

And there it sits, radiating electric charm, giving me the old come-on. I had no plans for another *Bosch* until the arrival of this seductive machine. Now, how can I stop?

Star Letter

Bob Tucker (on *Snorkel 2*, July 1980; printed in *More Beans*, October 1982, edited by Harry Bell & Ian Williams):

I underwent my first cataract operation about eight years ago and experienced the same amazing rediscovery of colours that Harry [*Turner*] did. Like him, looking at colours through the affected eye now reveals deeper and sometimes unexpected hues. I wondered about this for a long time and one day, during a visit to the doctor, asked him what was happening. I

learned that people who have had cataract surgery are people apart from you ordinary mortals.

We can now see into the ultra-violet.

Several years ago I visited Disneyland with a companion and, in some ghostly gallery, discovered that I was seeing more than she was seeing. The room, or tunnel, or whatever it was lit only with u-v lamps which were supposed to be reflecting off plastic ghosts and goblins and things like that. To me, the room was brilliantly purple and I saw the people around me, as well as the wires the skeletons were hanging and jiggling from.

This same situation was repeated at a museum in Indianapolis. The room was totally black to the others but it was brilliantly lit in a purple glow to me. We were looking at the Milky Way painted on the ceiling but the effect was lost on me because the room wasn't dark. My companion of that day, Sandra Miesel, said that Lester del Rey had the same faculty since his surgery.

So, now, Harry Turner joins us superior mortals. Just let the alien invasion come from Arcturus; we will be able to walk into their u-v lighted spaceship and see everything (even the aliens) while you grope about in darkness.

What the Reader Saw

Rob Jackson

Published in *Gannetscrapbook 2*, eds. Harry & Irene Bell, February 1975

Recently Dick Geis has been running in *The Alien Critic* a series titled *Translations from the Editorial*, containing individualistic views of what an editor really means when he says something diplomatic. So far he has not covered the blurbs you see in prozines at the top of the title page; you know – the ones they use to push you into having a look at the stories they’ve bought, desperately hoping you’ll actually read the things rather than just tuck them away in your shelf. I’d like to interpret a few for you now.

- | | |
|---|--|
| A genuinely superior story | = We had to read this through three times before we understood it properly, but as it is by a famous author we expect its flashiness will con a lot of you into enjoying it. |
| A good strong story | = This guy can’t write pretty flowing English for toffee, but he invents a nice tight bouncy plot. |
| A quiet and moving story | = This one hasn’t got an ending. |
| We are proud to offer... | = Whoopee! A Big Name back from the anthologies for once. |
| ... and gives it a subtle and ingenious new twist | = Our four hundredth story about alternate worlds/aliens/ whatever – and one of our lesser ones, too. |
| Chiller | = This one is about a little kid who gets misunderstood, or else a nasty way of finding some dead people. Or see below. |
| First rate story from a newwriter | = This one is about a soldier back from Vietnam, or about the freeways grinding to a halt, or a bored chap who gets his wish in an alternate time-world. Or see |

	above.
By... who says about himself...	= We let him/her rack his/her brains for this one instead, as it is the eighth essentially identical story we've bought from him/her.
Enjoy.	= This is a chiller, but it is a first-rate story by a new writer.
Unusual	= About a misunderstood kid / soldier from Vietnam / nasty way of death / stopping the freeways / a bored middle-aged chap who gets his wish by changing time-stream.
Suspenseful	= By another guy with no style, but who knits nice cat's-cradle plots. (Everything strings together.)
... makes a welcome return...	= If we publish this story in a series about a character who last appeared here seven years ago, all you bored old timers out there who were thinking of cancelling your subs might delay a couple of years, in search of The Stories They Used To Write.
... could be about... or about... or about...	= I'm not sure what this story was about, and I don't think the author was either.
There was a time when "spaceopera..."	= Here is a space opera.
This time around he tries a different tack	= This time around he does almost exactly the same thing again.
Fast becoming a unique voice...	= Isn't a unique voice yet.
Vividly detailed picture of life in the near future	= About a trip to Mars.

His... was nominated for a Hugo last year.

= Hint. This year too?

... carried to a logical and frightening conclusion

= Don't read too carefully or you might see the ending long before you're meant to.

Star Illo

Harry Bell (first published in *Maya* 15, July 1978, ed. Rob Jackson)



Star Letter

Ursula Le Guin

(On *Maya* 10, March 1976; published in *Maya* 11, July 1976, edited by Rob Jackson, with contemporaneous editorial comment in italics):

Thank you above all for printing doug barbour's review-in-general of James Tiptree's work. Barbour is absolutely first class – negative criticism is so easy but it so hard to do what he does, to say *why* a work or a writer is good and by doing so to increase your appreciation and send you back to re-read, or re-re-read.

I trust that Henry P. Pijohn does not exist, but is a Convenient Fiction. If he does I wish he didn't. I wish people who say things like "When I read a science fiction book I don't want to be educated and go to sleep. I want to enjoy myself and read a story," were all named Henry P. Pijohn so that you could recognise them the instant they were introduced, and get away before they started quacking. People with watertight compartments in their heads are very boring. It never occurs to them that one can read a story, be educated, enjoy oneself and then go to sleep, all at once except for the going to sleep part. Education is of course the trick word. Education is dull. Education is for like eggheads y'know man. Y'know like reading and writing and thinking and looking at pictures and driving so you don't kill all the pedestrians and making edible dinners and all kinds of stupid intellectual stuff like that. I don't wanna be like educated man I wanna live in a cave and eat bats. And tell myself real good stories about the last bat I ate. Yeah.

*Hoo boy... Hold on. I think we've both been more than a little unfair to Henry (who does exist, by the way). Especially me. Henry himself is not anti-intellectual or anti-education; if he was, he wouldn't have given up his Civil Service job 18 months ago to try to get to university to study chemistry. What comes over as anti-intellectual is what I reported him as saying; and ever since *Maya* 9's editorial appeared Henry has steadfastly denied saying any such things, attributing my editorial to my warped memory, and has been shocked and dismayed that I could report him as saying it – and also denigrate his forms of thought and expression the way I*

did. So as far as Maya 9's editorial is concerned, you might be right in saying he is a convenient fiction... and I'm sure that Henry has enjoyed at least large parts of the education he has received during his chemistry course.

I wondered for about 10 minutes how anybody, even Henry P. Pijohn, heard me on anything called Newsbeat on the BBC. I sure never heard it. Then I realised it must have been that really ghastly experience in January of '75 when I was here [*in London*] for the ICA jamboree and got trapped in this room with this drip and a microphone, in between some rock records and a long phone-in conversation about how to dripdry socks (I think it was socks, maybe it was military underwear, I remember a Retired Major called in about it). The jock was a very hard type with beady eyes, who had never read any sf, certainly not any of mine. He asked all the typical questions; and I hope I did come across eccentric and intellectual, and annoyed, and contemptuous; at least, I sure tried. I am beginning to think that the only way to respond to the contempt and patronising manner of all PR types towards sf, is in kind, with bells on.

Chris Priest left one thing out. I tried to explain to him that in the States there is a difference between “talking to” somebody and “talking with” somebody. “Talking with” definitely has a more genial and amical connotation – a conversation is implied. “Talking to” often means exactly what it says. A is talking to B and B is listening (willingly or not). The shade is so fine that I would willingly let a copy-editor destroy it in order to save the British Ear from an unseemly noise. But, as Chris points out, copy-editing of such delicacy is very rare (though Gollancz did some on my forthcoming book, *A Very long Way From Anywhere Else*, it's not sf, breathe easy, Henry P.). Anyhow, I must admit that to me those dialectical differences between British and American English are a pleasure in themselves; they only become embarrassing when one side tries to imitate the other and (inevitably) fails.

2015 PS from Ursula Le Guin:

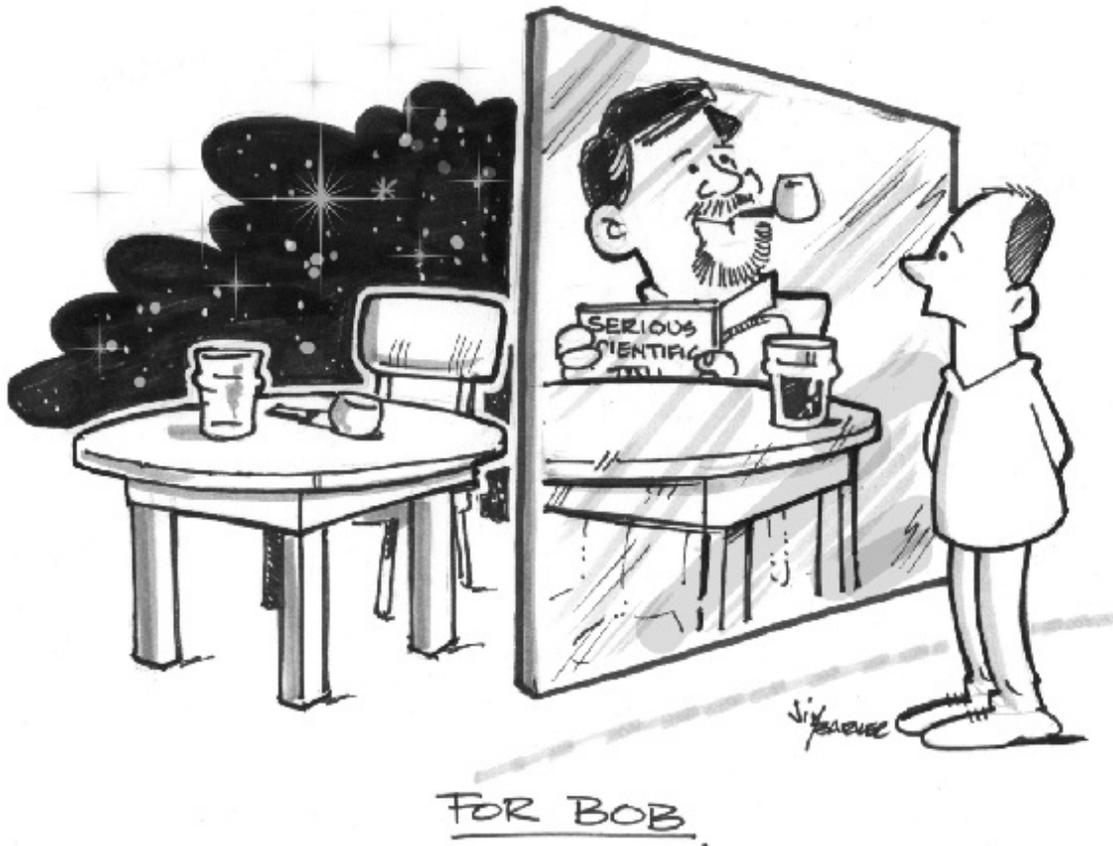
Certainly you can re-publish my grumpy letter to *Maya* of May 10, 1976 in *Tyne Capsule*. And will you please tell Henry P. Pijohn that I too have been berated for saying things I never said – also praised for saying something I never said and never under any circumstances would say – and know how frustrating it is. I'd like him to know that I am glad he exists, and sorry I snarled at him.

With all good wishes, Ursula K. Le Guin

Star Illo

Jim Barker

(2015, previously unpublished in print)



Wetfoot in the Head

Bob Shaw

First published in *Maya* 14 (ed. Rob Jackson), July 1977

Original art by Harry Bell

It has happened again!

Practically every fanzine popping in through the letterbox these days carries references which – sometimes quite deliberately, I’m sure – give people the impression that I’m a boozer. These stories began to be widely circulated some years ago, I believe as a result of a quite trivial incident. I had walked into the bar at a convention solely to look for somebody who wanted to discuss the sf writings of Captain S. P. Meek, and found John Steward eating a ham sandwich decorated with a sprig of parsley. Thinking he looked rather silly that way, I took the parsley out from behind his ears, put it in its proper place on the bread, and said, “That sandwich is soup-herbly garnished.” A nauseated expression appeared on his face – probably something to do with those strong cigars he’s always puffing – and he dashed out to the toilet. While I was minding his beer for him, other people came into the bar, saw me with the glass in my hand and jumped to the conclusion that I was a semi-alcoholic. Admittedly, I might have tasted John’s beer a couple of times, just to make sure it wasn’t going flat, but the whole thing is a perfect example of how rumours can get started.

And now I find that Chris Priest, in the *Maya* 12/13 lettercol, is adding to and embellishing the myth by saying that the first time we met, which happened to be in the toilets of the Bull Hotel in Peterborough, I had taken so much drink that I peed on his right shoe. Very cunningly, he sidesteps a direct libel by writing, “I’m not sure how the accident happened, perhaps one of us had been drinking.” This could be taken as meaning that he was so tiddly that he was standing with his foot in my stall, but as he was the injured party – and as we are all familiar with the devious way in which his mind works – there is no doubt about his real meaning. And as if that wasn’t enough, he then goes on to say that I have no recollection of the event, obviously implying that I suffer from alcoholic memory erasures! In point of fact, I remember the evening very well and, for the benefit of fan historians

who may want to make an accurate chronicle of such a momentous occasion, can testify that the accident had little to do with drinking beer. To be sociable at conventions I sometimes buy a pint and let it sort of dangle from my hand while I'm chatting to people, usually about the sf writings of Captain S. P. Meek. On that night in 1964 I think I had dangled about seven or eight pints, and suddenly became aware of a fierce internal pressure which necessitated a quick visit to the toilets. This must sound as if I'm contradicting myself and confessing that Chris's story was correct – but tarry a while, dear reader, as I unfold a strange story, a tale which will lead us into the dark byways of Pavlovian psychology, a drama which numbers among its cast the most powerful barons of English commerce and no less a person than the archangel Michael himself.

You see, for many years I was accustomed to wearing Y-fronts.

It is a measure of the unfairness of our society that the inventor of the Y-front is not accorded the same honours as Whittle with his jet engine, Marconi with his radio, and Eccles with his cake. The Y-front is a beautifully designed garment which provides snug warmth for the male wearer, while in no way hampering his bodily functions. Unfortunately, however, Y-fronts have become very pricey in recent years and even their most enthusiastic devotees have been tempted to try other and inferior products. An example in my own experience came in the closing months of 1963, when I went into Marks and Spencers, saw some St. Michael underpants which looked very much like Y-fronts and made the mistake of buying them. The ingenious authentic Y-front design must be protected by copyright, because the vital opening in the St. Michael product is a complicated, treacherous affair – bordering on fourth-dimensional topography – which, for want of a better name, I have christened the Penis Fly Trap.

Convolved and dangerous though the PFT is, it would represent a very minor problem to someone like me – who has sold a story to *Vision of Tomorrow* – were it not for the Pavlovian psychology mentioned above. A lifetime of wearing Y-fronts, with their excellent functional design, has conditioned my body to expect a very short interval – maximum of three seconds – between mounting the urinal plinth and beginning the designated business, and conditioning like that is hard to shake off. There are few experiences more alarming than to receive the correct visual stimulus – (view of white porcelain curvatures) and to feel the inexorable opening of various organic faucets in the abdomen while one's fingers are still frantically

searching for a way into a fiendish arrangement of seams, folds and blind alleys.

On the fateful night when I met Chris Priest the conditions were at their very worst. The beer pressure was very great and, sensing this, the PFT had – with a capricious malevolence rarely equalled – twisted itself into hyperspatial knots. All the cursed internal valves kept opening in progression, but just when it seemed I was about to suffer the indignity of wetting myself I managed to get a finger and thumb through into the inner sanctum, grasped the relevant organ at a very inconvenient place near the base, and – ashen-faced with agony – dragged it out by the scruff of the neck, concurrently spraying everything in the vicinity in a manner reminiscent of Cagney at his Tommy gun-toting best.

And that's how Chris Priest's right shoe got splashed.

All I can say – apart from stating that Marks, Spencer, St. Michael and Ivan P. Pavlov are the main culprits – is that he was lucky to get off as lightly as he did.



Looking back over the above account I'm forcibly struck by one thing (unhappy choice of words), namely that it is in rather poor taste. In an odd way, though, the fact that Chris and I are good friends in spite of getting off on a bad footing (I keep doing it), that he was able to go into print with his story and I'm able to go into print with my response – regardless of the indelicacies involved – illustrates one of the things I like about fandom.

There's a freedom of expression which most of the macrocosm would envy, and when there is really good communication, as with close friends, it's possible to talk about anything without causing offence or embarrassment. It's just as well, really, because some of my longest standing friendships in British fandom began with first encounters which were hardly propitious and which many non-fans would have found embarrassing.

There was, for instance, the time I moved to London in the early 1950s, began attending the meetings at the old White Horse tavern in Fetter Lane, met author Sydney J. Bounds, and was invited to his home for dinner. Nothing embarrassing about that, you might say, and I would agree – except that at the time he issued the invitation Syd was under the impression I was Walt Willis. Unaware of the mistake, I turned up at his home at the appointed hour. As soon as I began to suspect what had happened I made a point of talking a lot about Walt, and Syd – possibly aware that talking about oneself in the third person is a symptom of megalomania – grew quieter and more perplexed with every minute. Finally he set down his knife and fork (an indication of his state of mind – we were eating oxtail soup) and said, “If you're not Walt Willis, who are you?”

My answer didn't seem to strike any responsive chords – this was before I had sold a story to *Vision of Tomorrow* – but Syd, being a very gentlemanly bloke, allowed me to stay on for the rest of the meal, and a quarter of a century later we are still friends.

Another memorable first encounter also involved a meal, but in vastly different circumstances. I was passing through Lancaster, en route from Belfast to London, and had taken the opportunity to arrange to meet Ken and Irene Potter, who lived in the duchy at that time. Even in those early days the rumour-mongers were at work, though the emphasis was on food rather than booze, and I was preceded in Lancaster by a totally unjustified reputation for being a voracious eater, a reputation which stimulated Ken's warped sense of humour.

The Potters met me early in the morning at Lancaster railway station, which I thought was extremely nice of them. But when I naively extended my hand in greeting Ken shoved into it an enamelled plate of a type commonly used in Salvation Army hostels. While I was studying this object, Irene produced a box of breakfast cereal from behind her back and poured me a generous serving, while Ken – cackling like a madman – took a bottle of milk from his pocket and splashed it over the cereal. Watched by a group of

intrigued spectators, Irene then took a spoon from her handbag, stirred the cereal up a bit and bade me enjoy my breakfast.

There was nothing for it but to try to look unconcerned, as though this sort of thing happened all the time in my circles, so I began eating as we strolled through Lancaster, and was actually on my second helping by the time we reached the Potters' home. There's no way of knowing what all the mundane observers thought of that peripatetic breakfast, but I managed to enjoy it fairly well.

If there is any lesson to be drawn from the above incidents it is most likely to benefit overseas fans who are planning to attend a British convention for the first time: be prepared for anything, from getting wet feet to fed wheat, but most of all be prepared to meet a bunch of interesting people.

Star Letter

Rich Coad (on *The Grimling Bosch* 5, ed. Harry Bell, March 1976; published in *Tocsin*, ed. Harry Bell, March 1977, writing from Oakland, CA):

I know what you mean about fandom seeming a lonely hobby at times. The only fanzine fans in the area seem to be far too sercon for my tastes. Not that that would necessarily be a bad thing but they are also reclusive to a ridiculous extent. There are a few fannish fans too, but they also seem to be reluctant in joining fandom's social activities. In short, there seems to be no one interested in evenings of drinking and general silliness like there are in England. In a word then the Bay Area fan scene is dull. And, despite what Milton F. Stevens alleges, the Little Men are some of the worst perpetrators. Their meetings begin at a house (no alcohol) where they talk about the latest novel by Poul Anderson or some other hack and eventually about a third of the group (on a good day) drift down to Brennans (the most atmosphere-less bar in Berkeley) where they talk about (you guessed it) science fiction! Such excitement I find easier to live without than with. Just maybe, if things go well at Westercon, I'll try and build up a little empire of folks more interested in the social aspects of fandom than the sercon and see if we can't get our shit together. Christ, all the alcoholics can't live in Canada and Britain.

Steppin' Out – A Wee Adventure on the Train Harry Bell

First published in *Out of the Blue 2* (eds. Harry Bell & Kevin Williams), August 1980

In my capacity as Gannetfandom's Cultural Attaché I make it my business to go every year to the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition. The weekend I chose this year exemplified Britain's summer in that at mid-day Saturday the Met Office in London registered a light intensity of zero. Presumably this was between the flashes of lightning. But the rain and attendant thunder eventually gave way to a humid greyness and I went boating down the Underground to town.

Despite this lousy weather (and since 1976 we've had to get used to it, I suppose) the weekend was a good one and before catching the 125 back to Newcastle I'd arranged a few pints with Henry Pijohn. A fitting ending to a wet weekend but one that was to lead to something of a difficult trip.

If you haven't booked a seat on the train out of London it's advisable to join the queue early. My train was going to Aberdeen and the queue was fairly long even as I joined it, some fifty minutes before the train was due to leave. It was something of a surprise when, after only twenty minutes, they began to let us on. A carriage near the rear of the train was almost deserted and I grabbed a seat, noting with interest that the next compartment was the Buffet Car.

After thirty minutes of sitting, the train began to move and I began to be conscious of the fact that the last few pints of Guinness I'd had with Henry were by now well kidney-filtered and my bladder was at the stage where it would feel more comfortable empty. I didn't want to disturb the guy next to me so soon after leaving King's Cross so I sat for a while longer trying to take my mind off it with *Emphyrio*. Better choice than *Blue World*, I mused.

When the pressure became such that I thought it outweighed my duty to my fellow-passenger, I got him to move and I headed for the rear of the compartment, with that rocking gait so necessary for BR travellers, and noticing as I went that where, above the door, there should have been a sign

marked TOILET, or TOILET – ENGAGED, there was only black plastic. Good reason, too. Where the bog should have been there was a door marked something like “Guard’s Tools.” Bloody hell! What about *my* tool? I pushed on into the next carriage, a 1st class, and swayed along between the affluent heads on their antimacassars, thinking about the Revolution.

There was a yellow door at the end of the carriage and it wouldn’t open. It probably led to the Restaurant Car but it could have led to Janice Maule’s purse for all the opening it would do. Bugger it.

“S’locked, mate,” said a helpful chap in floral print shirt and shadow-check jacket. First class? I thought, and felt like Basil Fawlty. My urbane smile gave way to a fixed grin and I wove back the way I’d come, feeling irrational embarrassment as I passed my seat and my fellow-passenger did one of those curtsies-in-reverse, getting up and slumping down as I went past.

The Buffet Car was full of Scotsmen and not a few Geordies, swigging cans of McEwans lager and making life difficult for anyone trying to squeeze past. I reflected on how no one ever said life shouldn’t be difficult and squeezed past to the other end where, in addition to the queue for the bar there was a bunch of girls who hadn’t been able to get seats. Not surprisingly, they were playing the old game of taking it in turns to sit down in the bog. The girl who had just been enthroned when I got there felt she was not being given a fair shake of the stick when her friends shouted through the door the good news that a lad wanted to be in. “Tell him to fuck off,” she suggested.

The swaying of the train was doing me no good and it was obvious the chamber maid was in for a session, so I decided that I could stick it out a little longer if I went back to my seat. *Emphyrio* tried hard, but it had lost some of its fascination.

I tried dozing for a while but the dull ache which was developing brought visions of unsavoury friends in similar situations long ago. There was a guy, I remember, called Mad Pete who found himself caught short on the top deck of the No. 54 bus to Gateshead. Pretty drunk he was, too, and there was little we could do to stop him carrying out his threat to take a leak on the floor. Luckily, we were in the back seat and the bus was going uphill, so the pool formed at our feet. Luck, if you believe in it, lasts only so long and so it was that, as we topped the Windmill Hills and ran down Bensham Bank, also running down to the front of the bus were several rivers from our back-seat reservoir. It is a difficult thing to keep a straight face as, one by one, heads in front dip to stare at the streams between their feet.

This kind of thinking obviously wasn't helping, so after a while I shifted the guy next to me again and set off on a trek to Buffet Car country and beyond. The girl-in-residence at the end of the Scots and Geordie boozers was evidently in a drunken stupor and responding with silence to her friends' advice that "If you don't give somebody else a shot we'll fuckin' knock ye!"

The next carriage might contain head-hunters but I thought I'd be safer and foraged onwards. No head-hunters. Just a rucksack, a suitcase and a pram so firmly wedged in front of the loo door that several people were unable to solve the topological problem of how to unlock them without actually opening the carriage door. I tapped my foot lightly, smiled indulgently, and after a while went back to the Buffet Car for a sandwich before returning to base camp.

I tried dozing again, but Mad Pete was still up to his tricks in my adolescence. And it was the No. 54 again. Pete was determined to repeat the previous scenario but had been talked into a little restraint this time. No more embarrassing floods on the floor. Pete had discovered that either to assist the cleaners when washing out the bus, or to allow for drainage from feet on rainy days, some buses were equipped with little inch-diameter holes at floor level, leading to the outside air. By squeezing down under the seat Pete aimed to employ one of these holes as a urinal and when he started to tell the passengers in very positive tones that he was stuck, there was some doubt as to whether he meant himself or only a small part of him. It took a while to extricate him from under the seat, no time at all to be thrown off.

I am filled with nothing but admiration for the technology which has cut the trip from London to Newcastle to a little over 3¼ hours by the introduction of the Inter-City 125 trains and I suppose it's only the fact they feel obliged to carry other passengers that makes them in any way inconvenient. Filled as I then was with something other than admiration, the loo on Platform 8, Newcastle Central, could not come soon enough. It was between the shuddering sighs of relief that I remembered what it was that finally convinced me that I might be able to find better friends than Mad Pete.

Maybe Pete had a weak bladder, or maybe he was a potential flasher; certainly he seemed fond of waving it about. It was another boozy night, and while today it's snakebites and double Pernods, the obligatory drink then was Newcastle Brown, and lots of it. Pete was adamant, he would *not* wait until we'd walked to the station. He wouldn't even wait until we'd walked to Shakespeare Street. He was going to do it right there in Bainbridges'

doorway, and fuck the John Lewis Partnership. So right there, in the doorway of the biggest department store in Newcastle Mad Pete splashed his boots. We had the dubious privilege of having with us Pete's older brother Jacka, a lad possessed of an odd sense of humour. Grabbing Pete about the shoulders, he whirled him, still firing, out into the middle of Grainger Street, tracing as they went delicate wet arabesques on the tarmac. I think the lack of a real sense of humour on the part of the police came as a genuine surprise to both of them.

Those old days were fun, I guess, but my current friends are certainly an improvement on Mad Pete. They just piss on Chris Priest's shoes.

Gannets at the Cosmic Cocktail Party

Ian Williams

First published in *Nabu 5* (ed. Ian Maule), August 1978

Original art by Jim Barker

At Skycon this Easter, Bob Shaw received rapturous applause. And this was before he had even begun to speak. To say Bob is popular is something of an understatement. Since Tynecon in '74, Bob has been entertaining fans at conventions and in fanzines with wildly funny humour. In 1977 he was voted Best Fan Writer in the Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards (the FAAn Award). Other winners were Rob Jackson and Harry Bell, two members of the North East's Gannetfandom. And the then British agent was a certain Ian Williams.

So Bob invited us over for the weekend to be presented with his award – incredibly the first award he has ever won. At the last minute Harry couldn't make it, so Dave Cockfield came along instead.

We set off on the Friday afternoon heading for Rob's parents' cottage where we would stay the night. The cottage is in an isolated spot in the middle of nowhere on the slopes of a gradually ascending fell, a fell that ascends to the infamous Hartside Pass near Alston. It's infamous because it's nearly always blocked by snow in winter.

Arriving at the cottage after a pleasant hour's drive we found Rob's brother John there with his girlfriend. Being considerate folk and not wanting to disturb the happy couple we decided to go to the pub in a village about four miles away. Anyone knowing the collective Gannet attitude towards drink will realise what a brave, unselfish sacrifice this was. I made up for it by winning a couple of quid on the fruit machine straight off and not playing the machine again, much to the chagrin of the landlord.

It was a pleasant, quiet enough evening with nothing of note worth recording except for the rise in volume of Cockfield's voice with each successive pint he downed; John and his girlfriend were in bed when we got back and we crept around quietly so as not to disturb them. The three of us were sleeping in the large upstairs room, Rob in the double bed (just barely

adequate) with Dave and me in the bunks. I'd taken the upper so as not to have Cockfield's farts percolating down all night. It was a chilly evening (late October) so Rob had put on a small electric fire to warm the room. Dave meanwhile was pulling sheets off his bunk so he could put his sleeping bag on it. I just happened to turn round as he was doing this and noticed he had placed one of the blankets over the fire. Smoke was now rising from the blanket.

I like to think I acted calmly and carefully over this little incident. In fact I screamed, "Fucking hell!", pulled the smouldering blanket off and stood on it. The smell of burned blanket began to suffuse the room as Dave stood looking sheepish. A couple of minutes later John emerged from the room next door wrinkling his nose and asking what the smell was.

Friday's damp weather coalesced on the Saturday morning into a downpour. Rob gunned the car and headed towards the Lake District. Bob lives in Ulverston, a small town on the edge of Morecambe Bay on the far side of the Lakes. As Rob had told him we'd be arriving in the late afternoon we were taking the opportunity to see some of England's most beautiful scenery. From Penrith to Keswick (where we hoped to have lunch but changed our minds) and heading south to Grasmere, I peered intently through the windows as the Lake District is the setting for a certain novel Rob and I have been known to mumble about!

It was pissing down even harder in Grasmere so we went to the pub as soon as they would let us in. The particular pub we visited did very tasty lunches and quite reasonable beer. We decided to restrain our natural inclination to stay there till they chucked us out as we anticipated doing a lot of boozing at Bob's. After a mere couple of pints we were on our way again. Still having plenty of time Rob decided to go the scenic route (the rain was thinning) to stop by the attractive Tarn Hows. About halfway there we noticed a pub with the inviting name of "The Drunken Duck". It was situated at a road junction on a fell side. We looked at each other and decided to have just a half pint. We walked in through the door and were doomed. A log fire crackled in the hearth, adding to the warm, smoky atmosphere. The place was full of people about our age (mid to late 20's) including some quite tasty young women and the beer was Theakstons, a real ale the Gannets are fond of and it was kept perfectly.

We were only a little worse for wear when we finally reached Ulverston. As Bob and Sadie Shaw have never seen us in anything but this state, they

didn't notice a thing. The Shaw's house is a large one, not so much wide as tall with lots of stairs. Bob showed us around. His office/study was pretty spacious. A couple of things surprised me about it. One was the battered-up old typewriter he uses. The other was the comparative lack of books on the shelves. I'd imagined Bob to have one of those superduper IBM things like famous people (such as Andrew Stephenson and John Brunner) use and that his collection of sf would be vast. But it appears that people who write sf don't necessarily collect it.

Sadie Shaw is a lovely lady. Apart from being very attractive, she also has a lively, extrovert wit that contrasts and complements Bob's quiet, considered, dry style. I can now add that she is a superb cook. I used to think it was Guinness that gave Bob his healthy girth. Not so.

During the meal and on the way to the pub, Bob told us about the local beer. Hartleys it's called and it's a real ale, fresh from the wood. Apparently Hartleys was taken over by a big company who took the Hartleys beer out of the local pubs. So the locals stopped drinking until they put it back. I found this hard to believe, but would Bob Shaw tell a lie? An acquired taste he said, and worth acquiring. Definitely one of the finest beers around. By the time we got to the pub, Cockfield and I were positively drooling.

"What'll you have Bob?" Rob asked.

"Gin and tonic, please," said Bob.

He wasn't joking, he was on a diet.

The first pub he'd taken us to had a vegetable show. The place was littered with enormous lumps of vegetation – potatoes and tomatoes as big as footballs, leeks I could hide behind; they were almost big enough to fill Rob Jackson's stomach.

After one drink there, Bob took us to another pub, obviously his local, obvious that is, once we'd figured out who the "Robert" was they were addressing. It was a crowded, friendly pub which seemed even friendlier to me and Dave as we began matching Bob gin for gin. Sadie seemed to have a large capacity too. Alas, closing time came all too soon and it was out into the cold night for a five minute walk back to the Shaw residence where Bob and Dave got out a bottle of whiskey whilst Rob and I took to lager.

I didn't stay the course unfortunately. About three, Bob started playing comedy records by people like Bill Cosby. Now sadly I'm one of those people who just doesn't like comedy records, not even Monty Python which I love to watch, so before the records sent me to sleep I made my way upstairs

and slept the sleep of ~~Rob Jackson~~ the innocent.

One of my more unpleasant habits is to be insufferably cheerful when everyone else (especially Dave Cockfield) is hung over. I woke early, went downstairs and made myself some coffee. Cockfield joined me. He looked pale and miserable, the result of having matched Bob drink for drink. Sun poured in through the windows and I poured myself a can of lager. Dave winced. Rob looked slightly faded too when he arrived. Bob and Sadie were bright and cheerful. Bob's fifteen year old son (a knowledgeable fan of 50's rock 'n' roll) gave the impression he'd seen scenes like this before.

During breakfast Bob said, "I know a nice little country pub not far away..."

I looked up from my Cumberland sausage with scrambled egg and beamed. Dave's smile was more like a little quirk of the lips.

The sun shone bright on the vast Morecambe Bay. We even saw what we thought might be Blackpool Tower, a hell of a long way off. The hills around Ulverston were low and green. Birds darted in the air. It really was a beautiful and peaceful part of England and we thoroughly envied the Shaws.

The pub we visited was small and quaint. Old china barrels were set on shelves in the wall. The pub was more like an antique replica of a pub than a real one. Poor Dave Cockfield was even paler by this time.

"What's the matter, sunshine," I said to him somewhat insensitively and patted him on the back.

This callous treatment of Dave in his delicate state upset him and he lashed out at me. Fortunately he hit me, otherwise he'd have fallen off the chair. A few minutes later his bearded bulk shambled out and was gone for quite a while.

We saw him through the window looking dejected and trying to start a conversation with a passing goose. When that waddled off he settled for a cow that was peering over a field's stone wall. Bob, meanwhile, was in good form entertaining me and Rob with reminiscences and anecdotes.

We didn't expect to eat when we got back, intending to set off for home. But Sadie said she'd made some peppered steaks for us. And they smelled so delicious. Dave stayed in the living room cursing his queasy stomach while we tucked into more of Sadie's incomparable cooking.

"Have you ever thought about taking in lodgers?" I asked Sadie.

And that's more or less it. The journey back was quite pleasant. Dave had recovered considerably and was as articulate as he can ever be. We broke

the journey up by taking a short walk in the woods. And there was a beautiful sunset as we approached Newcastle.

That's a pretty lame way to end an article about what was an immensely enjoyable weekend spent with two of the best people in the science fiction world. Rob, Dave and I hardly stopped laughing all the time we were at the Shaws. Sadly what we were laughing at and about had long since fled in an alcoholic haze.

Now if we could repeat the weekend sometime, I might be able to remember the next time. Huh, Bob?

Bob?

Bob??

What do you mean they've suddenly moved back to Ireland!



What Has Fourteen Protons and Lives in Newcastle?

Dave Langford

First published in *Twill-Ddu* 14, ed. Dave Langford, October 1978

ANNOUNCER: Viewers are warned that the following programme contains a certain amount of content and also some dialogue, which may be offensive to some. Better to switch off quickly and read a good book –

[But already we are into the standard sf opening montage. An Apollo rocket boosts into the night... King Kong wobbles threateningly at it from the top of the Devil's Tower... a radiant Erich von Daniken slowly rises above Stonehenge... old *Astounding* covers show tentacular aliens ravishing Dave Kyle... the Phantom of the Opera hums a few bars from *Also Sprach The BBC Radiophonic Workshop*... Patrick Moore's eyebrows signal across interstellar space and Darth Vader eats the *USS Enterprise* in a telephone box.]

NARRATOR [through electronic warbles and "Woo Woo" noises]: This week *World Inaction* probes the phenomenon of science-fiction conventions such as Silicon 3. Are these events really a forum for literary discussion?

[Cut to MIKE DICKINSON studying Big Isaac's SF Adventure Magazine: he turns paler and paler, and faintly murmurs "Oh my God."]

Or are there stranger goings-on of which the general public knows nothing?

[Cut to Dave Cockfield bestowing a passionate kiss on Dave Cobbledick. Cut to Joseph Nicholas bestowing himself *again* on Helen Eling. Cut to the next day's *News of the World* with the headline MY 16-YEAR-OLD HUNK OF MAN, SAYS 33-YEAR-OLD HOUSEWIFE...]

NARRATOR: Some say that curious rituals take place at these secret meetings.

[Cut to Rog Peyton and Helen Eling in destructive frenzy on the dance floor. Cut to Rob Jackson uneasily fingering a water-filled balloon. Cut to Leroy Kettle delivering great chandelier-rattling blows to those who have displeased him, with a whole fistful of balloons, as the manager stands aghast.(*)]

* Harry Bell's lucid explanation of this was: "An element of silliness crept in." The manager nodded silently, almost as though he understood.

NARRATOR: Some say that mind and body alike can be endangered in the weird initiations of "fandom".

[Cut to Dave Cobbledick's missing finger. Cut to mounds of strange gastric produce dotted about the floor. Cut to Bob Day, who suddenly falls over and is dragged away. Cut to David Wingrove.]

NARRATOR: But what does the typical "fan" think of it all?

TYPICAL FAN [face in shadow]: Well basically it's, you know, a challenge, you sort of pit yourself against it all, I mean, I followed Rob Jackson's directions to the hotel and I felt I'd really, you know, achieved something when I got into an arrival situation only four hours late.

NARRATOR: Did you discuss sf then?

T.F.: Oh yes... there was a lot of that going on. [He shudders. Fade to crowded bar –]

IAN MAULE [casually]: Bought *Andromeda 3* in Newcastle today.

PETER WESTON: Bloody hell, have they published it?

[Closeup of *Andromeda 3*, showing long uncredited quotation from *Dot*. Sound of Kev Smith's teeth grinding in background.]

JOHN COLLICK [with an evil and ingratiating smile]: Hey Dave – how d'you kill someone with a laser?

DAVE LANGFORD [hereinafter "DRL"]: Well, you crank it up to immense power and turn it on and allow the searing beam of radiation to blast through the hapless victim's unprotected flesh...

JOHN: No, what I meant –

DRL: ... crisped and carbonised tissues, the intestines boiling and gouting forth their noxious effluvia –

JOHN: No, Dave, I mean is it efficient, is it economical to kill someone with a laser?

DRL: Of course it bloody isn't.

NARRATOR: I have here a postcard sent by Collick to Langford... [Reads:] "Our little natter on Friday night was most informative, since then I've managed to kill at least 43 people and haven't been caught since." I think that speaks for itself.

HAZEL: John Collick does look more outwardly wholesome than D. West, but... [Fade back to bar.]

JOE NICHOLAS: Ah, you've got *Lord Foul's Bane*.

DRL: No, just a hangover.

JOE [withering contempt]: Don't know why you bothered; it's just another typical fantasy conflict between externalised good and externalised evil...

DRL: You've read it, then?

JOE: Not yet. Perhaps I will before I review it for *Vector*.

GREG PICKERSGILL: Look here Dave, your wife has been sitting there knitting and no-one's spoken to her for an hour and a half... [DRL rushes to Hazel.]

DRL: Greg is worried about you, so I thought I'd come and talk to you. Nice weather, isn't it? What d'you think of the situation in the Middle East? Have you seen *Star Wars* yet?

HAZEL [eyes on knitting]: Don't want to talk to anyone.

[Meanwhile, a closeup:]

JOE NICHOLAS: We limp-wristed fans...

[Cut to Joe at breakfast, holding cutlery in limp-wristed mode. The suspense is agonising as he gradually saws through his bacon.]

NARRATOR: In attendance were outwardly respectable people such as Chartered Accountants and Civil Servants. What did they have to say about it all?

KEV SMITH: I think the neatest review of *Canopus* would go "Can of what?"

DRL: Gosh, that's clever. I wonder if I could make a joke about how Dave Wingrove's editorials are more to be pitied than censored?

HAZEL: No.

[The scene shifts to Cobbledick and Graham England, who are devouring vile faggots from which spurt clouds of mephitic vapour. DRL, downwind, is talking to Darroll Pardoe....]

DRL: You know, [sniff] there's something [sniff]... oh, I see. For a moment there I was afraid you had bad breath.... [They turn to survey the sulphurous faggots.]

MARTIN HOARE: Close encounters of the turd kind.

NARRATOR: Let us move very quickly to the serious programme items in which world-famous sf pundits Mike Dickinson, Evel Yn-Harvey and Kevins Williams and Smith will expound something or other. Another famed pundit, Greg Pickersgill, has chickened out and can be seen sitting halfway down the room.

DRL: [*sotto voce*, in front row of audience]: Glad I'm not up there, I'd only make a fool of myself – as, with luck, Kev is about to....

KEV [the rat]: But I think Dave Langford can tell us something about *Isaac Asimov's Rejection Slips Magazine*.

DRL: Bloody hell. Well, I've got this vast collection – they send you three or four big sheets of paper every time they reject something – you get a special envelope for subscribing to *IASFM*, and an essay on how to type manuscripts – good stuff that is, full of hints like putting in a ribbon and how it's essential to use symbols not found on British typewriters.

MIKE DICKINSON: I especially liked their useful tips about stopping typing before you reach the bottom of the page.

DRL: The best thing is their essay on "Futility." It seems that all the readers are typical Americans with huge mortgages and acute depression who've just paid for expensive car repairs and whose wives don't sugar their coffee properly, so when they read *IASFM* they only wish to hear of rich future people whose spaceships run well and whose wives sugar the coffee properly, and stories where everything doesn't go right for the hero are called futile and get rejected.

LINDA WILLIAMS: Why don't they sugar their own coffee?

DRL [nonplussed]: What kind of wish-fulfilment fantasy is it where you have to sugar your own coffee? ...Anyway, *IASFM* also has special little slips for special cases. I sent this Frank Herbert parody which Joe Nicholas liked, so it can't be much good; it started with the quotation *Versatility is the ability to swim on unknown ground*....

[Baffled laughter; perceptive murmurs of "He's pissed."]

DRL: ...The rejection said *OPAQUE*, meaning they couldn't understand it at all. Maybe they'd never heard of Frank Herbert.

UNKNOWN VOICE IN AUDIENCE: Wish *I'd* never heard of Frank Herbert.

SIMONE WALSH: This is boring, let's talk about the BSFA.

[Confusion. Frenzy. Whetting of knives in background. Cries of "Silence for the BSFA!", "Death to the BSFA!", "What's the BSFA?", "I'm going for a drink," etc.]

MIKE DICKINSON: That's no good, we can't say rude things behind their backs when some of them are here.

NARRATOR [as fighting breaks out and chairs begin to fly]: This exemplifies the taboos of this strange folk. To utter the fatal name is (as John

Dickson Carr put it) like whispering “Asbestos!” to a gang of pyromaniacs. Yes, the very mention of the BSFA –

[A weighted balloon strikes him and he falls unconscious.]

ROB JACKSON [sitting on floor at front]: No, wait. We’ve got some quite sensible BSFA people here – there’s Dave Cobbledick and Dave Wingrove, both of whom will listen to every criticism we make and will surely be as putty in our hands....

DRL [calling to Dave Wingrove at the back]: That’s Rob Jackson talking about you, Dave, in case you were wondering.

DAVE W: Thanks. I recognised the voice.

DRL: Bland, isn’t it?

[Slow fade to black. A message appears.] *IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: THE ROLE OF DAVID LANGFORD IN THE EVENTS OF SILICON 3 HAS BEEN GROSSLY DISTORTED BY HIS INABILITY TO RECALL THE COUNTLESS BRILLIANT THINGS SAID BY OTHER PEOPLE. THIS SLANTED PRESENTATION CANNOT BE HELPED. DO NOT ADJUST YOUR SET. DO NOT ADJUST YOUR CLOTHING. DO NOT PASS GO –*

NARRATOR [with bandaged head]: Well, what makes these fans tick? Their ways are strange: for example, after *Isaac Asimov’s SF Adventure Magazine* had been denounced at length by the panel you have just seen, Roger Peyton’s stocks thereof sold out at once. This is what psychologists have called the “nerd instinct”. And anthropologists have still not fully analysed fans’ curious rites, their perverse humour and warped ideals....

[To the bar –]

SIMONE: I still think there’s hope for Ian Garbutt. I mean, he’s only *sixteen* or something. Now there’s no hope at *all* for Robin Hughes, he’s *twenty-five*.... [A shudder runs through her at the mere thought of such age and decrepitude.] ... and he thinks Greg is some sort of *barrier* between him and fandom, he’s *hardened* in his attitude and *despises* John Collick for being accepted in fandom.... but Garbutt’s practically *adolescent*, he can still *grow up* and become a real fan.... surely....

[Silence]

[Silence]

[Silence]

JIM BARKER: I met Ian Garbutt at Faircon.

ALL: No! Good grief! What’s he like?

JIM: Well, he's sort of... um, well, you know... Tell you what, I'll draw him.

[He draws him.]

ALL: No! Good grief! He can't be like that!

[Laughter]

DAVE WINGROVE: No, that's pretty flattering. [He rushes off to denounce Ian Garbutt to the BSFA High Praesidium.]

DRL [rapidly]: Make a good filler for *TD*, that picture –

ALAN DOREY [more rapidly]: I'll be publishing sooner than you!

DRL: Oh yeah?

ALAN: Have a pint.

DRL: The picture's yours.

JIM: Don't I get any say in this, then?

ALL: No. [Little do they know that although the wretched Dorey will rush out a *Gross Encounters* within the month, he will utterly fail to include Jim's priceless artwork. Next time DRL will be less indulgent.]

[Fade to charades, with well-known cretins miming other well-known cretins. Rog Peyton has just borrowed a comb with which he simulates a starkly rectangular moustache. He clicks his heels – raises a clenched fist –]

ALL: Peter Weston!!!

[In another part of the bar:] DRL: Hey, Harry, remember that when you were pissed at our party you promised a *TD* cover?

HARRY BELL: No.

[Fade to Intellectual Quiz:]

QUIZMASTER COCKFIELD: And that picture came from the cover of Philip José Farmer's *The Mad Goblin!* [Tumultuous shouts of hysterical laughter from all present.]

NARRATOR: This quiz was largely about sf films, music, artwork and the like, causing such authorities as Kev Smith to dismiss it as a *sci-fi* quiz.... [As he speaks the fatal words a bound volume of *Tangent* strikes him down.]

[Fade to an Indian restaurant filled exclusively with ravenous fans. A fear-crazed Rob Hansen flees to eat Chinese nosh with his fingers on a draughty pavement –]

HAZEL: Thank you – that was very nice food indeed.

INDIAN WAITER: Oooh... say that again!

HAZEL: Very nice food.

WAITER: I like the way you say that.

HAZEL [outside]: I suppose he doesn't hear many cultured southern voices up here.

[Fade to a damp and insalubrious park, where football is being played. Disapproving figures watch from nearby allotments. Dave Wingrove looks peculiarly fetching in a slinky football jersey which, totally concealing his shorts (if any) gives a mini-skirted appearance. John Collick falls over with unusual adroitness and frequency. Jim Barker hefts toilet-rolls, but has no notion of the subtle physics of actually throwing them, which is expounded at length by a passing *Twll-Ddu* editor. Eventually a direct hit is scored on Ian Maule, who unsportingly does not fall over. Limp wrists abound.]

[The football game mercifully over, the Gannet Surprise is unveiled, Werner von Firth producing home-made plastic rockets which will symbolise the soaring intellectual power of sf as they zoom high over Newcastle. The second missile is the most successful, actually twitching whole millimetres into the air before it melts and droops obscenely. Certain fans leave in haste –]

SIMONE: It's disgusting. They could come down on anybody.

HAZEL: Dave thinks that if the police turn up they'll arrest him.

DRL: Well, one's practically bound to shoot through the window of a passing police-car if I'm in sight. And they always *do* arrest me. Mind you, I think I know what's wrong with those rockets... the solid fuel's probably damp and needs to be dried out. Now if they put them in the hotel oven –

ALL: Shut up.

[Cut to Bar. Silicon is nearly done. Fans about to depart are studying photographs from America with confused remarks:]

"Gosh, aren't they all huge."

"Look, that's Joyce Scrivner. Looks like Pat Meara inflated with a bicycle-pump."

"And there's Terry Hughes. Christ, he looks like a male Joyce Scrivner!"

"Who's that other huge fellow?" "Ssh, that's Rob Jackson!"

DRL: What is Ian Garbutt like?

DAVE WINGROVE: Well, don't quote me, but ** ** * ** *
***** ***** ** ** * ** * ** * [etc*t*r*, etc* t*r*]

SIMONE [aside]: Wingrove is but a flea on the dog of humanity.

[Brief flash of the Narrator being wheeled off with concussion, culture-shock and alcoholic poisoning, before the credits begin to go up over Mike

Dickinson's quintessentially fannish summary...]

MIKE DICKINSON: I've just woken from a dream of Ian Williams being whipped by marmosets.

•

ANNOUNCER: The next item will be a party political broadcast on behalf of the BSFA Committee.

SOUND HEARD IN LIVING-ROOM: *click*

What The Critics Said

BOB DAY: Certainly, there was plenty of falling over; and that even before Roy Kettle arrived! Of that, the less said the better.

JOHN COLLICK: Did you know that in the trial flying bombs, that used test pilots, a break in the fuel lines during flight produced an acid or enzyme which totally dissolved the poor Luftpilot? Not a lot of people know that.

CYRIL "BOGMORTON" SIMSA: My best rejection slip came from Ian Garbutt. It said: "*Tangent* is not a market for crap writing or literary masturbation."

IAN GARBUTT: It was interesting to see you refer to me as Ian Grabbutt, such fannish humour, Mr Pongford, is seldom to be found in British fanzines...

DRL: My apologies, Ina – but surely the ironic tone must have hinted that I was wittily quoting Kev Smith?

JOE NICHOLAS: I enjoyed Silicon, although I have to confess that I didn't feel myself to be enjoying it as much as last year. Why, I have no idea – perhaps it was because it was the second Silicon I'd been to, and a repeat of a particular convention is never the same as the first. And perhaps it was because I had less money to spend than last year, which is always something of an inhibition. It certainly didn't have anything to do with being parodied by Rob Hansen in the charades; I did, in fact, have a sneaking suspicion that I might be due for such treatment long beforehand. After all, anyone who wears crepe gorgette scarves, uses lipstieksalve and drinks Cinzano must be pretty fair game for that sort of thing. The only trouble was that I missed it! I went out to the bar to get drinks for myself and Paul Kincaid during the intermission, and the very first thing he said to me on my return was "We've just done you." *Wordless snarl of rage* Although I understand that

somebody else's (was it Alan Dorey's) mime of Malcolm Edwards was at first mistaken for a mime of yours truly. Poot. I wish to state, quite categorically, that there is no resemblance whatever between myself and David Pringle. None! None! (Shrieks of limpwristed hysteria, and all that.)

DRL: Now that's odd about the con: I enjoyed it much more than Silicon 2. A really good weekend...

NUJ REPRESENTATIVE: Excuse me, Mr Langford, but this section is quite clearly for *TD* critics and correspondents. You are a mere editor and should know your place.

DRL: Sorry.

HARRY BELL: I still don't remember promising to do this cover ...

Believe me Now – Hitches at an Exhibition Kevin Williams

**First published in *Out of the Blue 2*, eds. Harry Bell & Kevin Williams,
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Original art by Harry Bell

Post con blues is something that usually sets in quickly and fades after a week or so. Seacon, for me, took six months to be assimilated. Unforgettable experience. It was an enormous clash of cult and culture, pro and amateur, public and private. A stage for ego-tripping personalities, poseurs, fans and fun. A huge sprawling, crawling multi-tentacled beast true to the tradition that bore it. To the committee Seacon was a hard work high. When it was all over – great sense of euphoria and achievement (maybe just relief). Weeks later con members were calling each other regularly, to share the lingering good feelings, to dare to suggest that we do it again – “1983?” – “No we wouldn’t want to spoil the Aussies’ chances.” “1985 then?” “Hmmm... the hotel would welcome us back after the bar takings.”

Needless to say, nothing has come of it. I believe that it will be many years before the next Worldcon is held in the UK. It could take a whole new generation of Fandom, with the commitment, energy, contacts and credibility.

I am writing this article on the first anniversary of Seacon to relate some of my experiences in charge of operations. The Operations Room – one of the nerve centres of the con – was never quiet. At some stage or other every aspect and character passed through the doors (not actually through the door but you know what I mean). It was a stage of drama and comedy – like Peyton Place really.

Security

We hired an outfit called “At-Your-Service Security Ltd,” prop. R. Lee Smith (ex Met. Pol). R. Lee fitted the expected image perfectly. Take one part of a Dixon of Dock Green flatfoot, add a dash of N.C.O. and as sprinkling of

Montgomery of Alamein, and you have R. Lee Smith. 7' tall, 4' wide, size 12 highly polished black brogues which clicked with military precision when he walked. He was kitted out in a fine, elaborate uniform which held the appearance of authority, without looking too much like a proper police uniform (which is illegal) or a cinema commissionaire (which is just silly). A more helpful, friendly and co-operative "security operative" we could not have wished for.

He marshalled a curious motley of seven caretaker types on the fringe (or past it) of retirement and a couple of chirpy young suvverners. But they knew every nook and cranny in the Exhibition centre – nothing moved that they didn't know about. They were vigilant and co-operative. The fans really took to them. They really took to the fans – old R. Lee himself was amazed by the things going on around him – half naked nubile young slave girls fetchingly beribboned with leather straps, thongs and leopard skins got him to pose for photographs with them. Even the Beeb filmed him, though I guess he ended up on the cutting room floor (unfortunately not with a slave girl). They caught a gang of petty thieves pinching boxes of books late one night in the book hall. Their feet never touched the ground. They were in court the next day.

One of the suvverners turned out to be not a little paranoid about drugs. He would come in and report the latest marvel that had just walked, hopped or crawled past him. Later he arrived bearing a small white tablet with an "A" etched on the surface. "This is acid," he pronounced, with deadly seriousness, "I think we'd better call in the drug squad." He left quietly, after being enlightened as to what "A" really stood for.

He came in again that same day. The ops room, as usual, was heaving. A sprawling mass of humanity boiled in and out, seeking the answers to questions as diverse as could be imagined. Gophers sprinted. Walkie-talkies burred. The PA system chimed and bellowed. In the midst of this – "Silence please." The hubbub diminished slightly.

"There's a guy in the Sussex lounge smoking pot. I think that we'd better call in the drug squad."

Was this déjà vu?

Enter Kettle.

"Oh great, I'll go and join them!"

The guard stared at the rapidly disappearing form of Roy, unsure what to say or do.

“Err... he’s a committee member,” I said by way of half-hearted explanation. Soon Kettle was back.

“They’ve gone,” he said, grinning evilly at the guard, “probably dropping acid somewhere.”

Five minutes later R. Lee came in.

“Don’t listen to that dull bugger of mine,” he said, with feeling, “it’s none of your business what you smoke or swallow, as long as no trouble is caused.”

Now, we had this problem with a gentleman who came to be known as Reverend Fat Gut. We became rather attached to the good reverend, but kinda wished he were attached to something sharp with barbs. He was the guy who caused the chaos at the opening ceremony, by deciding that he didn’t think that the music played was apt for an opening ceremony of a science fiction convention and so he decided to do something about it – but I digress. All will be revealed later.

He accused the committee of not obeying fire regulations and threatened to call the fire brigade and police one evening when he thought that the main doors at the rear of the con hall, which opened onto the street, were locked. But they weren’t. R. Lee’s lads had wrapped chains round the handles to stop gatecrashers from thinking that they could come *in*. We set R. Lee on him. He was bristling. “It’s my responsibility, not his. If he thinks that there are any problems just point him out to me. I’ll give him one he can really worry about.”

The hotel itself had a separate security force. A totally different bunch of characters led by a guy called “Kurtz,” whose ominous name described well the nature of his security operation, as will be attested by anyone whose room party was summarily closed down on the first night of the con. This action led to a deputation to the hotel manager (myself, Pete Weston, Tim Stannard (our lawyer), John Steward and to lend weight – physical, not intellectual – Jerry Pournelle). The manager was suitably impressed and readily agreed that perhaps Kurtz’s actions of the previous night had been a little hasty, and that we should rest assured that everything would be all right for the rest of the convention. Indeed after this first incident the hotel staff were great. It became a routine scene to see dozens of crashed-out forms on expensive velour seats in the wine bar and Sussex Lounge every morning. Sleeping rough was everywhere blatant – *nobody* was disturbed.

Kurtz turned up in the Ops Room one afternoon and announced

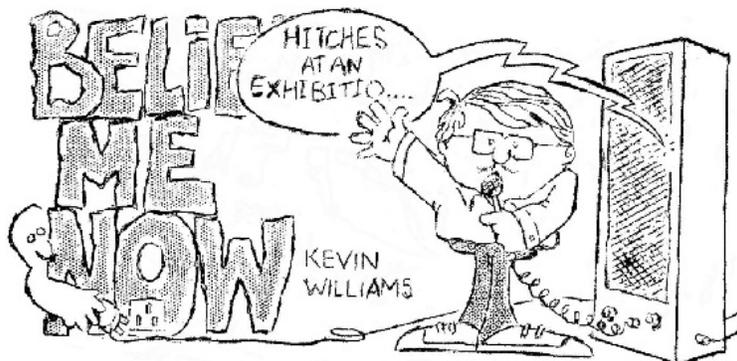
dramatically: “We’re going to call the Bomb Squad, somebody has padlocked a metal box to the leg of the piano in the Sussex Lounge.”

“Oh – that’s just Filthy Pierre’s – we’ll get him to move it.”

Kurtz remained unconvinced of the existence of any such person. Filthy Pierre was tannoyed, came, and unlocked his box and went. Under the steely eyes of Kurtz. (And we all know what was in the box, don’t we?)

In fact, there were very few security problems at Seacon. Both R. Lee and Kurtz were surprised that this was so in a convention of such a size.

“We get more trouble with the Conservatives’ Conference,” R. Lee announced to me one day.



The Opening Ceremony

This ceremony was designed to wow these world-weary cynical Americans right from the start. To show that we Brits could really organise things efficiently. The Second World War was not a flash in the pan, you know! However, the best laid plans.....

The ceremony was due to begin at 2.15.

It was now 2.00. The pipe band (a Pete Weston inspiration – not too popular with others) was stuck in a traffic jam somewhere to the north of the city. “Stall till about 2.30,” came the instructions from the chairman. Everybody stood by. The sound technician had all the music set up, the gophers stood at their posts, light switches, ropes to raise the Seacon banner at the prime moment. Sue was ready with the spots. Andy Firth had the bathing belles in the bar alongside the main con hall, buying them drinks and keeping them warm. I stood on the balcony ready to cue the slides and give all the signals for the sound, banner, spots, bathing belles and Scots Pipe band – although at that moment no Scots band. The tension on the balcony

was palpable. 2.30 came and went. The slow hand clapping began. The music tape was on its third time through. I grabbed the walkie-talkie.

“Pete! Where the hell is this band – let’s start without them.”

“Err... let’s give them a few more minutes...” came the reply.

Another voice cut across: “They’ve arrived! Or, at least two of them! Can you make do with one piper and a drummer?”

“We’ll have to,” said Pete – “this lot will riot in a minute!”

“OK, Kev. Let’s get it rolling,” said Pete.

I signalled the sound technician and the gopher controlling the lights. The lights went out. A derisive cheer arose from the audience. I awaited the growing volume of the opening anthem to begin the slides. None came. SILENCE. I looked in panic at the sound tech. He was sitting there, quite happily, cans over ears nonchalantly tapping his fingers to non-existent music. I tore the earphones from his head.

“Nothing’s happening!” I cried in despair.

“Wot? There must be – it’s registering on my gauges!”

“Bugger your gauges!” I screamed. “There’s no sodding sound!”

“I don’t understand what...”

I did not feel well.

The walkie-talkie burst into action.

“Martin here, Kev, some fat bastard has pulled all the plugs out of the speakers down here on the floor.”

“Christ, I’m responsible for that lot...” This stirred the tech into action. He sprinted for the stairs.

(This was where our Reverend had made his first memorable appearance – to turn off that inappropriate music – he just pulled out the plugs. Nice guy.) I got Peter on the walkie-talkie, explained what had happened. The slow hand-clapping returned, supplemented by jeers, cat-calls etc.

There was a feeling of impending doom.

“Pete, I think that you’re going to have to get up on that stage and explain what has happened!”

The only reply was a low moan.

The lights came up, more jeers, and Pete walked onto the stage to be torn to pieces. He tried to explain the status quo to an increasingly hostile audience. Such are the tribulations of leadership!!

The sound tech came back at a run. “S’okay now – let’s run.”

I signalled frantically to Pete to get off the stage.

The lights went out. Another jeer from the mob below. The anthem blared forth from the speakers! The slides worked, the banner worked, the spot light picked out the logo and as the anthem reached a crescendo, a huge cheer arose from the audience, who then frantically applauded.

Congratulations at last. SUCCESS – so far!

The introductions went well. Aldiss was as usual to be relied upon and gave a good and brief speech. The bathing belles came on – on cue. But what of the band, or piper and drummer?

After a couple of heart stopping faulty cues, the awful whining sound which can only come from the birth throes of a Scots Pipe band was heard. The entire band burst into the hall, sporrans askew and kilts a-swinging, playing as if their lives depended on it (which they did and not only theirs either). Everybody clapped along with those good old favourites as they marched up and down the aisle. Playing... and Playing... and Playing. Five minutes passed, ten, even fifteen and still they played. *Oh no!*

“Christ!” I thought, how long has Pete hired them to play for? Kettle and I were making frantic wind-up signals from the balcony. A murmur of rebellion was coming from the audience. Thankfully the band finished and walked out of the hall. Everything and body on the balcony was covered in a fine film of sweat.

SIFFWHAR

At some time or another I believe that every single one of the 3500 attendees passed through the doors of the Ops room (okay let me exaggerate just a little). But there were one or two personalities that you wished the wind had blown in the other direction.

There was this short, squat, fat annoying American professional, who with due regard to the laws of libel, I will call *Emzeebee*. She breezed into the Ops room with an air of royalty, the day before the con officially opened. “Neeagh... Ahm’n chadge of thuh Siffwhar sweyt, whetch we wood leyke run proper, ’cause we authors jest hev ter heve a plaice fower som paice’n quite, away from thuh fens.”

“Well that’s your responsibility then dearie,” I said, trying to sound as English as possible. (Which is not easy nor preferable for a Welshman.) I was determined to appear totally unimpressed. She was clearly disconcerted by the cool response she received. She became defensive.

“Oh... well humm. Well ah just thot thet ah’d tell you that mah son will be in teh sweyt rold the teyme, to keep it open.”

“Well, if he wants to be relieved any time just tell him to call the Ops room and we’ll send a gopher to take over.”

“Well, thenk yew,” she said and rolled out.

The next day.

“Whey, may ah know, hev yew not appointed a gopher to thuh Siffwhar sweyt?”

“But Emzeebee, we thought that your son was going to do it.”

“Ohh... did ah say thet? Hm... well ah’m afraid thet he changed his mind.”

“OK, we’ll get a gopher up there.”

Some hours later.

“I’ve been up here for two hours and nobody has been in,” phoned down the gopher.

Within half an hour Emzeebee was back, bristling.

“Ah assed yew to put a gopher up there dint ah?”

“But there’s nobody up there.”

“Aynd what des thet matter?”

“Do you mean that you want someone to sit up there all the time when there’s nobody there?”

“Ah dew.”

“These gophers are all volunteers you know, they’ve come to enjoy the con and they are not going to get much enjoyment sitting in an empty room.”

“Bet, they’ll be privileged to see all their fayvorite riters!”

There was a chorus of “hrrumphs” from the Ops Room and Emzeebee swirled and stalked from the Ops room not to be seen again. The best organisation of the con was to billet the permanently drunk and offensive Swedes next to the SFWA suite. They were even less impressed, if that was possible, by the ludicrous posturing of a small proportion of authors.

Then there was the Jacqueline Lichtenberg affair. A marvellous British joke on the pomposity of the same group. The affair has been reported elsewhere, but in the Ops room we had a slightly different angle. For a start – we knew sod-all. The first we knew was 10.00 one evening. Two women that I had never seen before in my life burst into the Ops room. One of them thrust a piece of paper into my hand...

“This is just disgraceful! We’re going to call the police...”

“No, Ellie. the American consulate... the Ambassador!!”

The paper was of course the J.L.A.S. newsletter, which I’m sure many of you will be familiar with. I hadn’t seen it before, and on reading, had great difficulty keeping a straight face. (For those not in the know – it was a deliberately simplistic “fan club” letter loaded with ego bursting barbs.) This letter had apparently been stuck on the walls of the hotel and conference centre.

“What’s wrong with it?” I said ingenuously.

“Why...” She was almost speechless at my reaction. “Why... it’s defamatory, libellous! The woman that is heving her character smeared bay thes trash, is a truly wunnerful hooman-been!”

“It’s all we ken do to stop her husband from beating up the foist person he sees wearing a J.L.A.S. badge!” She was breathless with indignation.

“What do you want me to do about it – we’re just in charge of con operations here.”

“Oohh... these are no help ter us Maisie... let’s just go n’call the American consulate!!”

“Err – calm down ladies... I’ll have a word with the security men to see if they can help.”

I went across to the Suvverner and told him what was going on with, of course, my own personal colouring. We both agreed to nod seriously as if agreeing on some decisive action. This was for the benefit of the two women who were watching from across the hallway. I adopted my best Frank Bough soothing and concerned face and went back to the women.

“It will be taken care of,” I said with as much reassurance and authority as I could muster. To my amazement, it worked, and they walked off agreeing how monstrous etc etc.

But of course the joke went on and reached its peak with a certain hairy arm doctoring the sponsor board with “THIS SESSION SPONSORED BY JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG” during the Hugo awards ceremony.

A further experience of authorial pomposity came with the committee party which was thrown for the guests of honour in the committee suite. I arrived to the party late, having been organising an autograph session for Chris Reeve. I was carrying a pile of magazines, and finding the door locked, knocked! Only to have it opened and them immediately slammed in my face by none other than that “good guy” Bob Silverberg. Absolutely enraged, I kicked the door, Silverberg opened it again, I hissed “COMMITTEE”

through my clenched teeth before he could object and barged my way past him into the room.

It was a scene just out of a George Segal movie; the room was full of beautiful people. Leggy blondes draped round furniture, suave men dressed in those dreadful white polo necked shirts (which went out of fashion with the rest of us fifteen years ago), smoking expensive, foul-smelling cheroots, and drinking obscure cocktails. Silverberg, Brunner, Sturgeon, Chris Reeve, Tom Baker, Jerry Pournelle, Larry Niven, Ben Bova and an amalgam of agents, wives, mistresses. I never thought the day would ever dawn when I would be glad to see Charles Partington. But there he stood, in the corner, with a crowd of his cronies, drinking the committee's booze and being loud and thoroughly objectionable to anyone who came within arm's length. He was great. A haven of sanity in munchkin-land.

Communication

One of the major functions of the Operations set-up was to ensure that the right people got to the right place in time to make things happen. This frequently worked very well indeed. Other times not so.

Lost and found articles and people were a frequent occurrence. We had sons and daughters being lost and on one occasion, a father being lost. In the Ops room we had a lot son and were tannoying for the father, while the information room had a seeking father and were tannoying for the son. Since the tannoying systems did not overlap, this went on for a couple of hours until somebody who had come through from the hotel put the two and two together. Unfortunately, the son did not belong to that father and so on.

Files of books, £300 cameras, tape recorders, coats, umbrellas passed through the Ops room. One afternoon, Roy Kettle and myself were relaxing with a few pints when in came a guy dressed in black from head to foot. Rather from neck to foot, because he had no hat.

“Has anyone found a hat?”

“A hat?” said Roy.

“Yes, a black hat.”

“A bat? A black bat?” Roy was in a pixie mood.

“No, no,” said the guy, quite seriously, “a hat.”

“A cat?”

“No, no,” he continued patiently, “a Hat.”

“A mat? A black mat?” Roy continued.

“No.... a HAT!”

“A cravat?”

And so it went on. We did finally admit that we really didn't have a hat. In fact no hats either.

A tall slim Victorian dandy tentatively entered the room one morning. By this time we were used to people coming in dressed in anything. This guy was wearing breeches, knee length boots, full length dress coat with lemon coloured piping and a ruff at his neck. He spoke in a serious tone.

“I think that you ought to know that there is another convention taking place in Brighton this weekend, a... homosexual convention.”

I was surprised, but puzzled. “That's interesting, but why tell me?”

“Well, I've heard that crowds of skinheads have been accosting people wearing badges, assuming they were homosexuals, and so I thought that I'd better let you know.”

“Well, thanks for the warning. We'll warn our members of this convention not to wear badges on the streets – if you'll do the same for your convention.”

He shrank back with a look of horror and gasped: “It's not *my* convention. I'm not one of them. I'm with Seacon!”

He backed out of the room, his face pale. Mine red.

Virtually the only accident that we had at the con was when someone accidentally knocked a pint pot off the balcony and it hit a fan on the head who was sitting in the con hall below watching *Superman*. He was carried unconscious to the Ops room, where soft-voiced Mike, one of the many American gophers, patched him up, and sent him off to hospital. When Sue and I returned from a meal we were greeted by a full military style report of the accident from Mike:

“At 10.30 pm on the evening of 26th August at the Seacon sf convention in Brighton, a white, adult, male, Caucasian, approximately 6'1” in height, 165 lbs in weight, was carried into the Operations Room, unconscious. He was suffering from a superficial wound to the upper left cranium. A shallow two inch crack in the skin was surrounded by extensive bruising. The wound was loosely dressed and the patient given a small drink of water...”

And so on the report went describing the incident in the minutest possible detail. He was back within two hours, head stitched, and returned to watch the film. However his main concern was his pint. He had left it in the

film hall. *A true fan.*

Pyramid to the Moon

It had been basically a hard core of about 20-30 gophers who had done the bulk of the work. Many volunteered and then did nothing – notable among this group were the latest branch of UK media fandom – the *Hitch Hiker* fans. These were little more than a nuisance. The rest, though, were magnificent, and knocked themselves out for the con. Pete Weston decided that we should reward them for their hard work by throwing a huge party. This took place on the Sunday night and (unknown to the hotel) thousands of cans of various alcoholic drinks were bravely carried into the hotel in large suitcases by Messrs. Weston and Edwards.

The objective of the party was to build a pyramid of beer cans to the moon. Building materials were provided – unfortunately filled with liquid which needed to be disposed of in some way, before construction could begin. The gophers set to the task with great enthusiasm. Pete had laid on a few treats like a belly dancer (it's only an unfounded rumour that Peter did actually lay on the belly dancer), a raid from the "hotel security," in the form of Imperial Stormtroopers, and a few celebrities. Everyone had an extremely jolly time and utter drunkenness was widespread. One of the widespreads that was utterly drunk (apart from my good self) was a certain Fan Guest of Honour (*), who was last seen settling down for a comfortable sleep cuddling a metal floor ashtray as a pillow.

** The Fan Guest of Honour at Seacon '79 was Harry Bell.*

I'd like to thank all those gophers who really helped out. They know who they are – the caucus of the Gopher Liberation Front, an organisation which sprang up out of Seacon.

So, after a year, has Seacon left any lasting effect on fandom? If it has it is elusive. Contacts were made and renewed and considerable fannish activity was stimulated. (Perhaps significant is that most of it was reprint.) No ne vibrant fanzine editors have appeared and the rest of fandom plods on as before or slides into gafia or prodom. But, I believe that maybe Seacon sowed a few seeds which may yet sprout.

It certainly was an experience which no one could forget quickly – whether they enjoyed it or not. But it was definitely not the sort of thing that I would want to attend every year as fans presumably do in the States. At this moment I am very much looking forward to the cosy fannishness of Silicon and later Novacon. Small stands a better chance of being fannish than big. But big could serve a greater purpose and maybe have a more lasting effect.

And Now For The Locs

Ian Maule

First published in *Paranoid 7* (ed. Ian Maule), 1979

And now for the locs on Paranoid 6 (or was it seven....)

CHRIS PRIEST

Jackie's story was really triffic, I wish I could write as good as that all the time. If I could I would set up my own fan club so all my true fans would be able to meet me in person and we'd gather at conventions and all talk about my books and say how good I am, and to repay all my loyal fans I would take them on a tour of the book room and show them Rog's stand and point out all the good books by me that they could buy – 'cos Rog needs the money.

Keep up the good work with *Paranoid* and I hope you get another Jackie story really soon.

[Thanks for those kind words, Chris. Yes, wasn't Jackie's story super. When she handed it to me I nearly wet my pants in excitement. To think, Jackie gave me one of her priceless stories.]

ROBERT HOLDSTOCK

Jackie's story was really triffic. Much better than all that crap that people bring to Milford.

ANDREW STEPHENSON

Jackie's story was really triffic. Much better than the carp in *Analog*.
[Something fishy here.]

GARRY KILWORTH

Jackie's story was triffic, really, and much better than the stuff in *Focus*.

CHRIS EVANS

I hate you, Maule. Holdstock and I were second in the queue for Jackie's story; but we did get another, not so good, but still worthy of publication in *Focus*. So there.

DAVE LANGFROD [no relation]

Jackie's triffic story was well up to her usual high standards. However, she failed to mention any weapons. Now if she had a copy of *War in 2080* she would see that on page... (20,000 words omitted here)... anyway, a banana powered by a reactionless drive can be useful.

KEV SMITH

As I have not yet sold any stories I feel that I am totally unworthy to say anything at all about Jackie's triffic story. Perhaps I can write a story like Jackie's and sell it (to *Paranoid*?) and then I will really be a proper writer in the Peter Weston approved manner.

IAN WILLIAMS

Well, I suppose Jackie's story was okay, even though she hasn't suffered like I have and hasn't had the meaningful experiences which make my novel so triffic.

[How'd that slip in? Sorry Ian.]

ROB JACKSON

Why can't I get material like this for *Inca*?

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

As *Paranoid* is only four pages in length (and therefore, by implication, a frequent publication) I think that (although Jackie's story was really triffic) the length of *Paranoid* precludes any lengthy discourse on the integral merits of her syntax (however much I feel that it does deserve to be given this kind of fully detailed and exhaustive critical examination) and because of this I feel I cannot do justice to it in such a short letter. Okay Boss?

ALAN DOREY

Okay, Bwana, this is where it's all at, right. Great ish.

JOHNANDEVE HARVEY

I/We can't comment on *Paranoid 6* as I/we have another fanzine to complete in the next ten minutes.

PS. There is no truth in the rumour that I/we are clones cultured by the BSFA Council.

[I for one never thought for a moment that the BSFA had anything to do with culture.]

This is Cactus Country

Abi Frost

First published in *Ansible* 39 (ed. Dave Langford), August 1984

“You realize,” I said to the Southern Fuhrer some time after the con, “that if anyone *else* had put on a con with bloody great papier-mache cactuses all over the place, we’d be groaning about this being the ultimate degeneracy of fandom...”

“You could be right, at that,” said Gregory.

Degenerate it may have been, reactionary it probably was, but the Mexican seemed – to these somewhat biased eyes – to deliver the goods as promised. (*Much* to our relief; I for one spent 12 of my first 24 hours in Newcastle in excruciating pain from Anxiety Stomach, which I tried to cure by spending longish periods in my room reading D. West’s Great Big Yellow Thing and J. Ruskin’s *On The Nature of Gothic*. Hungover on a Monday morning panel, I was quite unable to remember which of them had written some snappy quote about rules and standards I wanted to use. Ruskin’s fanzine criticism much overrated, in my view.)

Well, glory be. It was a con of heroes, anti-heroes, and Amazing Sights Never Before Witnessed. Greatest hero of the lot was Chairman Kevin Williams, without whom etc etc; some larger conventions might be put to shame by his sheer professionalism as an organizer. Surprise hero by acclamation was Alasdair Gray, a shambling figure in a greenish jersey, with a trufan’s attitude to the demon drink (even Pickersgill Punch when the bar closed), who won everyone’s heart by falling asleep on the con hall steps during the disco. (Nobody drew on him, but he drew pictures of people in the bar on Monday.)

Collective heroes were Riverside, the punk PA crew, who provided a panellist for Phil Palmer’s punk-and-comics-fanzines show, turned up the volume during nuclear blasts in *Atomic Cafe*, and drank their Pickersgill Punch in pints. They also turned up on time every day, even when they’d been up later than I had. Heroine, for me, was Kate Davies, who completed her trufannish metamorphosis at Mexican, wearing an astonishing selection of most un-Trekkish clothes (everything from grape-coloured Victoriana to

1984 prole-garb). Arch anti-hero was The Mysterious Kilted Scotsman, who appears causing trouble and devastation in pretty well all the accounts of the con. No space for full details, but you *must* hear how a certain TWP administrator found him asleep on a landing, made the traditional examination, and dashed away, face curdled with disgust. To some extent he atoned on Monday, paying some exorbitant sum for the larger of the cacti, egged on by a stream of gross personal abuse from auctioneer G. Pickersgill.

Our Gregory was the surprise anti-hero. Pickersgillian Black Moods scarcely come under the rubric “never before witnessed”, but his Mexican downer was a lulu. “Shabby, shabby,” he snarled on Saturday night, presiding like a malevolent spirit over what most thought was the best con disco in history. On Sunday he perked up, had a Real Good Time at the fanroom party, and by Monday’s auction he was everyone’s favourite wicked uncle. “You can’t *wear* it, Katie,” he told Ms Davies of the backdrop she was bidding for. (“Yer wanna bet?” said her expression); “Jewish comics fans don’t want them,” (failing to sell some fanzines to Lilian Edwards) “so they must be good!” What he said of Phil Palmer has been recorded elsewhere and is in any case obscene.

Collective anti-heroes were Newcastle U SF Society; on Friday night one of them started objecting to a panel on Current Burning Issues (mostly a good old row about Seacon), then announced his intention of walking out during the next item, discussion of Knockabout Comics and censorship in general. Not enough to do with written SF, he reckoned, and no amount of reference to Philip K. Dick would change his mind. The Society walked out en masse despite the suggestion that one of them come and put their case to the audience. Linda Pickersgill later seems to have calmed the man down; but they never quite got into the spirit of the con; once I found the whole lot in the continuation room, silently reading skiffy books.

Anti-heroine, if I’d been making the list beforehand, might have been Joy Hibbert, foremost in the silly “Mexicon is elitist” campaign which annoyed the shit out of us during the run-up to the con: once she arrived she seemed to enjoy herself, though, and even to have recanted. Amazing Sights... well, it depends what you think amazing, and there are some sights better left unrecorded. But there were unforgettable moments of madness and pure magic. Ah, John Jarrold’s birthday cake! Presented to him by three Chiquitas in pink plastic Mexi-jackets, it hung round on the fanroom table looking embarrassed for much of the con. In the end it was auctioned: Rog

Peyton couldn't get any takers for the whole cake, and not enough for a slice-by-slice sale, so ordered a collection for Jarrold to eat it whole. (Raised about £40, which proves some people's appetite for disgusting sights hadn't been sated by *Pink Flamingoes*.) By this time JJ had started cutting it up and it had begun to collapse into fragments of sponge and hard baby-blue icing; furtively, one eye on the collection bucket, he began eating the bits. The bucket returned: on a count-down he hurled the wretched thing into his face and sucked quite a lot of it down. Pickersgill, who ate a bit that fell on the floor, said it wasn't bad really.

Unlike Gray, who took the con straight to his heart and liver, Russell Hoban sometimes seemed a little withdrawn; like a man with a secret. We found out what it was during Paul Kincaid's interview with Hoban: suddenly he drew out (from where? His shoulderbag?) a little automaton. This, he announced, was the original Mouse and his Child – and then he set the two figures dancing. The hall was bewitched, silent and breathless; then at once alive with clapping... More applause for Geoff Ryman's dramatization of *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. A play at a con? we'd wondered. In the rehearsal time available? Could it really work? It did. Bloody hell, it did, uniting everyone there for the whole evening.

Another something I've never seen before is the spirit in the con hall during the panels I put on. During the first few items I – and I would guess Chris Evans and Paul Kincaid, skiffy supremos – felt a little alarmed at the smallness of the audience. It only gradually dawned on me that, though we were putting on a programme that might be comparable to an Eastercon's main programme, the con itself was maybe a quarter the size, in terms of people actually present. And when discussion got going – you were magnificent, Mexipeople. This really was the con where everyone participated. I was particularly grateful for this on Monday morning (future committees – no more 10am starts, *please*), when Anne Warren decided she'd better add some sense to the hungover ramblings of me and my fellow panellists. (That was one hell of a fanroom party...) Oh? The serious written SF stuff? The boundary-breaking film programme? The special convention bar prices? Bloody hell, Langford, do you want me to write about that as *well*?

Star Letter

Robert Bloch (on *Durfed* 1, March 1975; printed in *Durfed* 2, August 1977, edited by Kevin Williams & Neil Jones):

Thanks to the miserable state of the postal service, your magazine arrived. I hasten to assure you that *Durfed* is indeed all that you say it to be, and less. It is by far the best read I've had since *A Herpetologist Looks at Monty Python*. Or even before, if you take my meaning. No, I'll take a small Guinness. Please maintain your present level of excellence – do not, repeat, do *not*, aim for anything higher. Remember – in the kingdom of the Morecambe, 'tis folly to be wise.

The Mexican Spirit

Kevin Williams

First published in *Leone Dopo Sonno* (ed. Kevin Williams), Frank's APA, July 1984

Mexicon. It's all over. Wharrawegonnadonow?

Maybe I shouldn't be the one saying this, but I believe that the Mexican spirit is doing good things for fandom. There was a new sense of fun abroad at Mexicon, a new feeling of unhassled bonhomie and good vibes. It brought home forcefully to me, the extent to which many recent conventions just seem to be going through the motions – doing the same thing, in the same format, with the same “conventions” built in – just bigger this time than last. At least Mexicon tried to do something a bit different, and I think succeeded. The convention was focused, demanding, energetic, and involving to a degree that created such an atmosphere of uniformity that it seemed almost outrageous that a few fans and pros went off to be cliquey and/or stupid in their own rooms! There. I knew I shouldn't have started off on this, but self-congratulation has always been one of my strengths.

Mexicon also produced an interesting piece of evidence which seems to point up how media interests are now a dominating factor in the attendance of Eastercons. At the con I had an interesting debate with Caroline Mullan on this point. Caroline totally disagreed with the suggestion that I had made (in the Programme Book) that it was the conscious embracing of and catering for fringe interests that had caused the explosive growth of Eastercons. Caroline reckoned that if they only catered for SF, then only 50 or so memberships would be lost. Since we were both arguing from the point of view of unsubstantiated opinion, we eventually had to agree to differ. However, I now have some data!

For Mexicon we had excellent local advertising, to try to encourage as much interest as possible in the area – practically saturation coverage: local TV; local radio; an article in the Arts North newspaper; another in the local “Time Out” equivalent plus a listing; posters in the university and polytech and most of the bookshops throughout the region. Based on the evidence of Tynecon '74, which had much *less* local coverage, we confidently expected a

minimum of 100 walk-ins. We got 38.

I am convinced that this was a direct result of the fact that all of our advertising pushed the fact that the con was oriented to written SF, plus of course lots of fun too – quizzes, games, discos, parties, famous authors, book room and so on. But just written SF and feature films that reflected SF ideas. We got 38. Tynecon '74 got 150!

It would be interesting indeed to see what kind of attendance a “Written SF Eastercon” would get. Alas, we’ll never know – it would never win the bid. Hey... that’s an idea....

So as Mexicon continues, it will become more and more distinct from Eastercon, whilst in no way “competing” with it. The two cons are different now, and that difference can only grow. Eastercon has changed as it has grown and will continue to do so, and there’s nothing wrong in that. I’m not going to argue with a juggernaut. Next year’s Mexicon will have, I predict, a membership of 350 + 100. Who knows how many will turn up at Leeds. Both are open to all.

So what of this Mexicon? Well, I didn’t enjoy myself at all for the first two days, even though everybody else seemed to be having a great time. Greg, I think was the same. This was due to anxiety fuelled neuroses – concern to *make it work*. I was getting myself into a paranoid state trying to make sure that everything started on time (this achieved the proportions of a fetish) and that the bar didn’t close at disagreeable hours and so on....

But by the Sunday, the sheer bonhomie of the whole thing got to me, and I climbed down off the ceiling and started to enjoy myself. The atmosphere was tangibly marvellous and a number of vivid images remain with me:

- The committee party on the Sunday night was a great success, but so very nearly didn’t happen. With shortage of cash deriving from shortage of walk-ins, we couldn’t really afford one. Fate and the hotel management took a hand. The hotel turned up with quantities of vodka, sherry and cider, in response to a vague and ill-defined request (of mine) made some weeks earlier, which I had forgotten to cancel. The spirit they were prepared to take back, but the cider we had to buy anyway. So, c’est la vie. We had a whip-round of the committee, and purchased an enthusiastically large quantity of extra booze. The infamous Pickersgill punch which resulted, had an electric effect on the party and actually outlasted the people into the very early hours. Alasdair Gray (general wonderful person and great discovery as a con guest)

was seen boogieing the night away with almost anybody (mostly “good-looking women with interesting faces”) in his (fairly usual) well-oiled state and stained Marks and Spencer jumper. Volatile substances reddened faces and raised the noise level. The sweat and the sound threatened to flatten the flock on the wallpaper.

- The disco on the Saturday night saw Jarrold and Sue Williams doing their “Grease” act (this has to be seen), Greg wrestling with a frail old woman to keep the door open into the bar, and there again was Alasdair Gray on the stairs into the con hall, in an amazingly rigid alcoholic coma. Head back, supported by his elbows, torso rigid, to all intents catatonic. After two hours, he came around, smiled benignly and went back to the bar.

- Snod, Prof, Bobbie and the rest of the “Riverside” musicians crowd, who provided the best PA system ever heard at a con, joined in, had a ball, and became characters of the convention. They contributed actively to the panel on “other fanzines”, but will be chiefly remembered for their prodigious drinking abilities (particularly of the free punch) and also the way that they made their own statement to the con. Disturbed by the light-hearted fatalistic attitude being displayed by those of us viewing “Atomic Cafe,” they turned up the volume of the 1000 Watt PA system to full each time a bomb was dropped. A small sample of what the real thing just might be like!

- The Play. Thanks largely to Geoff Ryman whose indomitable, unstoppable, unbelievable energy saw the whole thing through. It was curious to note the different behavioural pattern of fans for the play. For just this one item, they by and large arrived in good time and didn’t come crashing in and out. Though this may well have had something to do with the threats of dire recriminations being voiced by Greg and Sue outside the door. But it was amazingly quiet. For an hour and a half, we were no longer in the convention, but in a theatre and all the behavioural conventions were obeyed,

- The Royal Tournament – fans in huge boiler-suits stuffed full of balloons and transported by their team over, under and through a series of obstacles. Tim Illingworth was dropped on his head, but it didn’t seem to help. A bizarre sight, and masterly compered by John Jarrold.

- The Auction. I’ve left this bit until last because for me it summed up the whole feeling of the convention. The attitude and atmosphere at the impromptu auction on the Monday morning was so good. The word had got around that the con was in a bit of a financial jam, and people rallied around, donated books, cakes, pesos, cacti, empty bottles, book sleeves, almost

anything – and then *bought them back!* There was so much good feeling that I could've wept. The money made at that auction (good old Rog Peyton) saved our skins. Also Gregory Pickersgill in great articulate and insulting form: “Even Phil Palmer’s bidding and you know what a tightarse he is – not that I have personal experience of this...”

Other quotes:

“This is what Albacon should be like – something happening” – Ian Sorensen.

“I’d like to pick up on that point you’ve just raised Rob – but I can’t remember what it was...” – Garry Kilworth on a panel early on Sunday morning.

“Alasdair Gray calls matches ‘Lucifers’ – what a man!” – Snod

“The best con for twenty years” – Rog Peyton

“Alright.... *Alright....*ALRIGHT! *ALRIGHT!!* You’ve justified your fucking convention – I suppose it’s OK” – D. West

All My Own Work

Ritchie Smith

First published in *Gannetscrapbook* 5, June 1978, ed. Dave Cockfield

Next, a little meditation on writing. Like a lot of fans (including personalities as diverse as Gray Boak and Greg Pickersgill) I rather fancied seeing my name as a by-line under sf stories – a pure case of creative itch.

Not *too* long ago (... he lied...) I sold three sf short stories to good old Ken Bulmer. More precisely, I sold 60% of a thing called *The Seafarer* (literary buffs among the readers can check out the allusion to an Anglo-Saxon poem), 90% of a novella known as *The Banks of the Nile* (music buffs among the readers can check out – oh never mind), and, all my own work, an erstwhile novel-fragment, *Amsterdam*.

Not too surprisingly, the ramshackle cubbyhole of the “great British publishing industry” known as *New Writings in SF* collapsed under the strain. I was left with some cheques, reviews in *Vector* and the *TLS*, and some additional stories. I sat there among prosaic fragments. I was twenty-two, and knew I ought to get down to it. I found a colourful story written with Thom Penman; this time he had the lion’s share. Eventually, though, after a number (a small number) of rejection slips he succeeded in putting me off it, and it remains unsold and unpublished to this very day (12/3/78). I also had a story about... well let’s see, reincarnation, the far future, “gods,” the United States in the 1920s and a black guy who played blues with the early masters. Somehow, I couldn’t exactly imagine Ben Bova falling upon the manuscript with cries of glee. (“Glee... Glee!”)

I was worried. Nothing was working out, 2 + 2 didn’t always equal 4. What I produced that did satisfy me aesthetically was neither what I *wanted* to produce, nor what I *needed* to produce. I thought back to the great old London days of ’74, to a falling-away that has always made me pause and brood a little. I wrote poems before I was twenty-one, and afterwards I didn’t (which of course translates out as I *couldn’t*). Not exactly distinguished literature, but as a means of self-expression it was important to me. Slowly and surely, though, my words of poetry were becoming irrelevant to my experiences. Finally, I sat down intending to confront life as I knew it; I

wanted to write poems about three people I knew and had great respect for. One of these persons was Leroy Kettle, the (justly famous) fan and poor man's Woody Allen (or the Jasper Carrott of many tedious hours and places that were only redeemed by the master...).

It is of absolutely crucial significance that, when I did write one of the three poems, it was not even really about the civilised lady who (under a misspelling) gave it its title; it was only about my relationship to certain refined qualities it was poetically convenient for me to regard as being symbolised in her. (And just for completeness' sake, the poem about the Ms. in question is to be found in Lisa Conesa's *Zimri* 8.) As for the other two poems, I failed, totally, forever. I cannot write such things anymore.

So I do sometimes worry that prose too might someday fail me. As I grow older I am naturally more and more submerged in "real life;" I lack the excess irrational energy of adolescence. I did, once need to fantasise and brood and create (imaginary) versions of me, but no longer. I suppose so many sf/fantasy writers start out so young, and so colourfully, and so well, and fade away into mundane greyness, gimmicks and self-plagiarism, and "series" novels, for essentially similar reasons. Most adults finally declare a separate peace; the real texture of our lives becomes, if not totally fulfilling, certainly totally pre-eminent over mere daydreams and wish-fulfilments.

This is of course, in so many, many ways, really the end.

The Rime of the Ancient Fanwriter Andy Firth

(with a presumed tip o' the hat to some bloke called Coleridge – Ed.)

First published in *Gannetscrapbook 6* (ed. Ritchie Smith), February 1979

PART I

It is an ancient Fanwriter,
And he stoppeth one of three,
“With thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Why d’you pick on me?”

“The Convention doors are opened wide,
And I am booked right in,
The guests are met, the feast is set,
May’st hear the merry din.”

He holds him with his skinny hand.
“There was a zine,” quoth he.
“Piss off, unhand me, greybeard loon,
Before I do for thee.”

He holds him with his glittering eye,
The young fan-ed stands still
And listens like a three years child.
The Fanwriter hath his will.

The young fan-ed sat on the steps,
Outside the con hotel,
And listened as the Fanwriter
His tale began to tell.

“The zine was cheered, though most times jeered
But I still pubbed my ish.
I tried to make it humorous,
But some called it rubbish.

“The critics’ words were venomous,
Inflammatory and vile.
‘You can’t have fun with your fanzine,
‘Tis nought but juvenile.’

“And then there came the diary zines,
Elitist name-drop rags,
Each sentence detailing a life,
As each life clearly drags.

“Critics here and critics there,
Critics all around,
They cracked and growled and roared and howled
To put a fanzine down.

“And through the petty bickering
And meaningless reviews
No science fiction did I ken
Though I them all perused.

“At length did cross a B.N.F.
Who said that he would write
An article or two, to help
My poor zine from its plight.

“But though he’d read nigh every book
Upon the SF shelf,
He never wrote a single word
’Bout any but himself.

“But when they saw his massive name

Within my little zine,
Their vitriol was sweetened then
As if some light I'd seen."

"God save the ancient Fanwriter
From fiends that plague SF.
Why look'st though so?" "With my biro
I lampooned the B.N.F."

PART II

"And though the locs came through the door,
They all said much the same:
'This B.N.F.'s a mate of mine,
Take not his name in vain.'

"My local fellow fanwriters
Unanimous and stunned,
Said, 'No more rotten jokes or else
Our own fanzines be shunned.

"Put away your pillory,
It brings us disrepute.
Our SF group will be disgraced.
Shut up, or get the boot.'

"And all averr'd I'd barbed the fan
Who carried mighty clout.
Writing of yourself, they said,
Is what fandom's about.

"But then an I.M.F. (*) loc came
From out the distant West.
'I thought the way you took the rise
From that B.N.F. was best.'

* *Immensely Munificent Fan*

“Then all averr’d I’d barbed the fan
Who didn’t count at all.
Writing of yourself, they said,
Made fandom seem so small.

“But time wore on, and gradually
Then sudden came the shock.
Our whole SF group to a man,
Had caught fanwriters’ block.

“Quarto, quarto everywhere,
Corflu, stencils, ink,
Quarto, quarto everywhere,
But not one thought to think.

“The duplicator seized right up,
The stapler fell in three.
And slimy things did crawl with legs
On the typewriter keys.

“And some in dreams assured were
What spirit plagued us so.
Lampooned in my last ish he’d made
Our inspiration go.

“Ah! Well a day! What evil looks
Had I from old and young.
Instead of SF, the B.N.F.
Around my neck was hung.”

PART III

“And then there passed a weary time
When not an ish was pubbed.
And all requests for contribs to
Our SF group were snubbed.

“A weary time, a weary time,
How glazed each weary eye.
Since in our search for comment hooks
We’d drunk Newcastle dry.

“Then looking westward, I beheld
A something in the air,
Like a scene from *Close Encounters*
Or a psychedelic flare.

“And though we all observed this thing
This awe-inspiring sight,
Not one of us could find the words,
We’d lost the power to write.

“We tried. We knew we must convey
The sense of wonder seen.
But only I self-plagiarised
Could cry: ‘A zine! A zine!’

“For there in faultless margined type
Full colour and A3
With articles by everyone
From Aldiss to Zelazny

“There was a fanzine in the sky,
Perfect in every way. Yea!
Like the best parts of *SFR*,
Twll Ddu, *Algol* and *Maya*.

“The polemic was redolent
With wit caustic and fine,
Controversy abounded there,
A barb in every line.

“The sercon stuff was excellent,
Exceeding expectation.

Hard science grading all the way
To wildest speculation.

“The artwork was magnificent,
With bold and towering visions,
And tiny cartoons with a charm
That gilt their sly derisions.

“The humour ranged from sarcasm
To crooner spuelisms.
High sophic paralysis to
Base pantagruelisms.

“And there I stood like Harlequin,
All pantalooned and dumb,
Looking on this mighty work,
Despairing, aching-numb.

“Then methinks we heard a voice
Say ‘I authored this tome;
‘My name is Aussie Fan-Deus,
I’m from a different poem.

“Look on this zine and realise,
Ye fan-eds who’d aspire:
You can’t please all your readership,
You must invoke some ire.’

“And then the voice and zine were gone.
I shook my head to see
The only fan-ed left around
To pub his ish, was me.

“They’d all moved on to harder jobs,
Got married or matured.
Of four times fifty local zines,
Only mine endured.”

PART IV

“I fear thee, ancient Fanwriter.
I fear thy skinny hand.
For thou art short and swarthy brown,
And clearly four parts canned.”

“Fear not, fear not, thou young fan-ed;
My fanzine never failed.
Alone, alone, all all alone,
I collated and mailed.

“And though I sent my little ish
To all the fannish folk,
Not one replied with hate or praise
Or sent a single joke.

“I tried to do a sercon zine,
But research made me blind.
And every time I made a point
A gag would spring to mind.

“I still had fun with my fanac;
A fan does what he must.
But every ish was treated with
Disdain, dogma, disgust.

“Pariahed by my fellow fans,
In abject poverty,
The zine which had become my life
Now took my life from me.

“I gave up food to pub my ish,
And starved to print my zine,
To capture all the humour of
The image that I’d seen.

“Ex fan-ed ghosts in fever came
To put things in perspective.
The B.N.F. around my neck
Forgave me my invective.

PART V

“I dreamed I had a vast response
Come through my letterbox.
And when I woke, there on the mat
Lay ninety-seven locs.

“Ex fan-eds said a Hugo could
Be mine and they’d help win it.
But though they typed and duped my ish
Their heart was never in it.

“They helped review and edit things
Where they were wont to do,
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools
We were a ghastly crew.”

“I fear thee, ancient Fanwriter.”
“Oh really? Why? What for?”
“You’ve trapped me in a poem that must
Become a crashing bore.”

“But that’s the contradiction,
The grisly paradox,
I’d given up my fannish fun
For a handful of locs.

“Endowed each ish with suffering,
My soul’s sincerity,
The price you pay to overcome
Dread mediocrity.”

“You tire me ancient Fanwriter,
Thou ochre coloured elf.
Since verse thirty-six you’ve talked
Of little but yourself.”

PART VI & VII

“Alas I cannot help this thing
That now afflicts me thus.
My thoughts become too involute
To be gregarious.

“Ex fan-ed friends they pity me,
For I’ve forsaken all.
My marriage and career have gone
Neglected to the wall.

“And though I’ve won a Hugo and
Become a B.N.F.,
My ish costs too much to produce
To buy any SF.

“I’m trapped in adolescentness.
My fanatic obsession
Stunts responsibility,
Arrests my life’s progression.

“Pursuing trivialities
To put into my zine,
My unfan life stagnated and
Then wallowed in routine.

“And though I am a big name fan,
‘Tis known but to a few.
Beware the danger, young fan-ed,
This fate could befall you.

“I was a sane and happy man,
Content to read sci-fiction,
Ere I discovered fandom and
The bitterness and friction.

“I knew not then the meaning of
Egoboo or paranoia.
But if you take it seriously,
Frivolity destroys yer.

“I knew not of the backbiting,
And stark intolerances,
The sycophants, the twisted minds,
The blind incompetences.

“I was respectable until,
Pathetically involved,
I sudden found my very life
Around fandom revolved.

“Beware, my young fan-ed, beware!
And always stay aloof.
Then if the critics pan your ish,
Just hit 'em with a spoof.

“For many hold opinions bold,
But few may realise,
Unless someone originates,
There's nought to criticise.

“And there are causes worthier
Of your so precious time,
And literature tenfold more meet
Than this parodied rhyme.”

The Fanwriter whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with beer is stained,

Is gone, his skinny body slipped
Twixt the grating of a drain.

The young fan-ed turned from the Con,
Like one of sense forlorn.
A sadder and a wiser fan
He rose the morrow morn.

Desperate Fun

Linda Pickersgill

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I could tell it was going to be a good convention when we walked into the Grosvenor Hotel and a pint of Guinness was thrust into my hand before we'd even finished registering. It was bottled Guinness as the concom's plan for acquiring a keg of draught Guinness fell through but what the hell, it was a good sign. We found our room, threw in our gear and went back to the bar straight away. "Determined to have fun," I muttered to Gregory.

"Desperate fun," he answered in return. These had been key words in our vocabulary for the past several weeks. The previous Silicon just hadn't "jelled" for us and we were determined to make this one work. A positive attitude – that was the answer. We were going to have fun – desperate fun.

At the bar we greeted and hallo-ed the familiar faces which, for the first time in my brief history of British con attending, was almost everyone there. I caught up on all the who's-doing-what news, stared in awe at a positively skinny Jim Barker and settled into conversation with Rochelle Dorey about how "neat" the Grosvenor was. We just don't have hotels like this in the States, all small and neat and old and cosy like some great auntie's living room full of antique clocks, landscape paintings and plants. As this was her first Silicon and I was a "woman of experience" I took her on a tour of all the nooks and crannies and winding passageways.

In true American fashion, the pool room caught her eye. We decided to get in a few practice games before the con tournament began. We put one set of coins in the machine and another on the edge of the table to assure us of an uninterrupted time. No such luck. Midway through the first game, a couple of men come into the room, non-con members and salesmen by the sound of their conversation. They put their money on the table next to ours, glanced at their watches then rolled their eyes and exchanged a look that said, "Bloody women pool players.... they'll be all night trying to finish a game." I'd seen that look before. To counteract I put on my most determined, tough-assed ace pool player look and continued on, missing every shot by a mile. Rochelle,

meanwhile is beating the pants off of me. I continue to look tough and miss shots.

The salesmen are sighing and shuffling, looking at their watches. One approaches the table. “Try aiming for this ball here. Hit it a little to the left.” Oh, I hate it, I hate it when they start giving me unasked for advice. What I hate even more is the fact that I know what shot to make, I can see how it should be done but my body just doesn’t want to follow through.

Mercifully Rochelle wins the first game at last but we still have another game to go: “Oh, let them play their game first,” I snap at Rochelle, partly in indignation over their impatient hurry, partly pissed-off at myself for playing so badly. One of the fellows suggested we play teams, one of them and one of us per side. It seemed a fair thing to do and I agreed. My “team” lost the game. We also lost the next game. Obviously my pool-playing skills were not going to sharpen this weekend. Rochelle went on to play another game with one of the fellows while I sat in a chair and sulked. When the 14 year old kid walked into the room with his very own pool cue in a leather case I walked out. “Gotta have fun,” I mumbled to myself on the way to the bar, “Determined, desperate fun....”

Poor Ian Williams chose this moment to ask me to captain a charades team. “No,” I grumbled. I’d never played charades before and after my bashing at pool I wasn’t ready to be subjected to more humiliation. He pleaded his case well, though, and I finally agreed to be on a team if he got somebody else to be a captain. This appeased him and I went on to the bar for desperate fun. Half an hour later Rochelle bounced up to us victorious from the pool room. “Hey – guess what – I’m captain of a charades team. I think you’re on my team too.” Maybe some of her luck if not her enthusiasm would rub off on me.

A rumble in my stomach reminded that I’d not eaten in quite a while. I searched out Gregory to see if he was ready to go up to the room and dine on the wonderfully delicious chicken pasties I’d made specifically for our Friday evening meal having slaved over a hot stove all Thursday to do so. “Nah,” he said, handing me the room key and flicking away a few tell-tale crumbs from his beard, “You go ahead. Chris and I already had some.”

“Chris and you? Chris and you? What do you mean Chris and you already had some?”

“Chris mentioned earlier that she was hungry so we went to the room and had some of the pasties.”

“Well you left some for me, didn’t you?”

“Of course I did. Don’t be silly,” he snapped before turning back to his interrupted conversation.

“All right,” I said to his back, “I’ll just go up there now – alone.” I trudged slowly up the stairs. “By myself – to eat whatever crumbs are left,” I said over my shoulder to no one in particular. They were having too much fun. I stomped up the stairs, rhythmically reciting, “desperate fun, desperate fun, must have, desperate fun...” In the room I ate through the broken fragments of chicken pasties left at the bottom of the plastic bag while staring out of the window down on the scenic alleyway behind the hotel, wondering if I looked as pathetic as I hoped I would.

With my stomach now happy it was time to put my brain in a similar state. Back at the bar the company and conversation were too good to keep moping. Before I knew it I was having the desperate fun I’d been so determined to have. Eleven o’clock rolled around and people were being herded into the function room for charades. Rochelle was having trouble rounding up all four of our team and I noticed other teams having organizational troubles as well in that one Chris Atkinson, Team Captain, was nowhere to be found. Last minute substitutions were made but wait, no.... we weren’t ready yet. Somebody had to run off for a drink and another somebody had to go to the loo. It was at times like this that I really had to fight down the teacher instincts in me. There was an urge to stand on a chair, and direct people: “you – sit there and you over there. No, you can’t get a drink of water now. You had your chance....” Then I remind myself that despite the similarities in behaviour this is a group of adult fans and not emotionally disturbed, maladjusted adolescents.

The first two teams took their places and I observed the gestures commonly used. Rochelle had rallied Paul Kincaid and John Harvey to our side and whispered a continuous pep-talk: “All right now – we can do it, we can win....” I’m wondering if we can. Every single title that Neil held up for the audience to see was unfamiliar to me. And I thought I was an SF fan! The first round ended and we got up to play. For the life of me I can’t remember any of the titles we mimed though we did end up winning which surprised the hell out of me.

I stayed up long enough to have another drink or two before going to bed. It had been one of those long days and desperate fun can be tiring. Besides, I wanted to get up early enough to have....

BREAKFAST!!

I love breakfast. It's my favourite meal of the day. I could eat breakfasts morning noon and night. I remember how delighted I was when I discovered that breakfasts were usually a part of a British hotel's service. We'd missed most con breakfasts in the past but this time I was as determined to have breakfasts as I was to have fun. Nine o'clock Saturday morning I leapt out of bed and dressed while trying to rouse Gregory with my breakfast song: "Oh, it's breakfast time, breakfast time – little eggy-weggies and greasy bacy-acy-on time....", I sing to no tune in particular while dancing around the bed, throwing on my clothes and brushing my teeth at the same time.

Greg stares at me from under the covers as if he's having a bad dream. "Get up," I tell him, shaking the bed, "or I'll sing some more."

"NO," he croaked, "No – you just go on downstairs and I'll join you in a minute." I make sure I see him standing on his feet before leaving the room. I sat in the lobby and read all five morning papers before he came down. Taking him by the arm, I led him to the dining room where we promptly found a table and ordered two full breakfasts. We ate in relative silence though I nodded "good morning" to people and remarked to Gregory on who looked more alive and who more dead this morning. Harry Bell was among the more dead and as we passed his table on the way out Greg started giving him the usual "what's the matter with you, then" hard time. Poor Harry.

Before the con was to continue I needed to go to the corner store and buy a few things vital to my well being such as indigestion tablets and cans of Coke. Greg came along to buy his own vital bar of ice cream. Chris Atkinson came along for some fresh air and to tell her tale of the night before. Seems that all this fast living and hard drinking had caught up with Chris right before the charades time and resulted in her getting unexpectedly sick in a corner of the hotel. It was a tale we could both identify with and in sympathy Greg bought her an ice cream and I gave her some indigestion tablets. We told her all about determined desperate fun and she agreed to join our cause.

Back at the hotel I left Greg and Chris arguing whether or not it was too early for a drink and took a peek in the function room. A video tape of *Alien* was being shown and I looked upon my favourite scene of the film in which the baby Alien breaks out of John Hurt's twitching body. I stood in the back of the room long enough to see Harry Dean Stanton get snuffed then wandered back to the lobby where it seems many fans had already decided it was not too early for a drink. Sometime around noon the SF quiz began and I

was there to give Greg and the Welsh team proper wifely support. The game continued in an expected fashion and I sat feeling dumber than ever about SF.

At some point midway in the game I became aware of a peculiar noise: “click, click, click...” It baffled me for a moment but then I noticed that it was Hazel Langford sitting in front of me, her knitting in hand: “click, click, clack...” But there was more clicking in the room than just Hazel’s knitting. “Clickety, clickety, clickety...”, to the right of the room I see Janice Maule knitting earnestly at quite a fast pace. “Click, clack, click...” – behind me I see Helen Eling and Krystyna Oborn sitting next to each other, chatting in a whisper while knitting away. I was surrounded by knitting fandom! I was about to ask one of them when they expected the troops to come home when the quiz ended with the Welsh winning this first round.

Arnold Akien busied himself setting up the video tape machine and soon *Assault on Precinct 13* began. I’d heard that this was a pretty good John Carpenter film and Harry assured me that it was indeed a great film. That was enough endorsement for me so I sat next to him and watched. The beginning of the film established some tough, cool characters and I can imagine that the middle saw some real action and the end must have been terrific. Unfortunately I didn’t get to see the middle or end of the film because the tape was so bloody bad. It was like trying to watch a film through a snow storm. Not that this stopped Harry or I from sitting through the whole thing, mind you. He interpreted what was going on for me and I sat listening to the gun battles. “Boy, I bet that was a good scene.” “Yeah, you really ought to see it sometime.” Well, the music was good anyway.

I always find late afternoon to be the slowest time at a con and often take advantage of this to nap a bit. I figure you’ve only got so much energy to spend at a con and I’d rather spend mine late at night when things get more desperately fun. Greg thinks my napping is a rather unusual habit but then we all know how late he stays up at cons. I left instructions for him to wake me up when people decided it was dinner time.

“Wake up! Everybody’s about to leave for an Indian Meal.” “Huh? What?” “Come on,” Greg says, pulling on his coat. “I’ll meet you downstairs.”

“Oh – wait – no – oh, go on. Don’t let them leave without me.” I shake off the sleep and throw on some clothes and stumble down stairs while still brushing my hair expecting to see the tail-lights of the dinner party leaving me behind. I should have known better by now. Some of the group were in

the lobby, some on the front sidewalk, some in their cars already. “Where’s Harry?” “Who’s going in my car?” “No, I’ve already got six people in my car already.” “Wait, I don’t know where this place is. I need a guide.” “OK – you go in that car and you...” “Wait, wait – where’s my jacket?” “What do you mean they’ve left already?” I choke down the teacher-urge rising in my throat and just jump in the first car I see. It’s Chris’s car and soon Greg, Dave Bridges and Harry as our guide crawl in as well.

We take off and Harry directs us through Newcastle and into what looks like the warehouse section of town. “This place is really good,” he tells us, “they may lack a bit in decor but they make up for it in food quality and low prices.”

We parked in front of what definitely looked like a warehouse. In a door and up some stairs we went and found ourselves in a l-a-r-g-e room that could have been a first floor of a warehouse except it had some tables and chairs and a few bamboo wall hangings. Way on the other side of the room we could barely make out the rest of our party. In the fifteen minutes it took to hike over to where they were sitting we worked up a good appetite. The waiter took one look at our huge party and handed us his pad, asking each of us to write our own order to avoid confusion. A good idea. The rest of the meal went as most convention Indian meals go: confusing, loud, gross and silly. Harry was right – the food was good.

Everybody was in a jolly mood back at the hotel. The SF quiz play-off took place and the Welsh team retained their title. Each winner was presented with a bottle of wine and Greg was overjoyed to get his hands on a bottle of Lambrusco at last.

Next teams were formed for some game called “Fannish Appendages”. The con com seemed to go out of their way to set up this unusual game. While a screen and projector were being set up Kev Williams explained the rules: “We’ve taken photographs of fans and isolated just a part of their body on a slide. We’ll show each team a slide and they must guess what part of the body it is as well as whose body it is. Just to make it more confusing, the part may be shown upside-down or sideways.” While both the teams and the audience were going “huh?” the room darkened and a blob of flesh appeared on the screen. A wave of giggles was followed by whispered guesses as to what it was.

“O.K., Team 1, what is it?”

“Uh, is it an elbow?”

“Wrong. Team 2?”

“Is it a nose?”

“Right. Now, whose nose?”

“Uh, Leroy Kettle?”

“Right! Two points to you.” The game continued: pot bellies, double chins, earlobes, knees and cleavages all showed up looking more obscene and alien than you could imagine. The audience enjoyed guessing as much as the teams. “I know, I know,” Sue Williams would shout enthusiastically whenever the teams seemed to take too long to answer. “Of course you bloody know,” answered Kev, “you helped make the slides.”

“Those are tits,” Rochelle would whisper, “aren’t they? Yeah, those are tits.” It was always something else but she kept guessing tits anyway. It’s all in the eye of the beholder I suppose. Too soon the game ended. More appendages! That’s the kind of thing that whips a crowd into a frenzy of desperate fun!

Secret Policeman’s Ball was the next item up in the function room but I left with a group for the bar and lobby. Films can often break the flow of a good time at a con, though I have to admit to sneaking back there once to watch a Monty Python routine. It was filmed during a snow storm as well. I took Ian aside and told him how violently I would complain about the condition of these films when I returned them to a rental company and how I’d demand my money back. He shook his head yes but I knew he wouldn’t do it. If only Ralph Nader were with me. I generally caroused around after that, talking and drinking for a few more hours before deciding Gregory looked like he needed to go to bed. We staggered to the room and crashed out.

My breakfast dance was a little less enthusiastic Sunday morning though I was still keen. I chattered away about this and that at the table and asked Greg if he was going to play football today. At the thought of football Greg scraped his breakfast onto my plate. “Ice Cream,” he muttered, “must have ice cream.” Oh well. I ate our breakfasts then met Chris in the lobby. We’d heard about an arts & crafts market nearby and decided to look into it. On our way out the door Greg joined us, saying that he’d walk with us as far as the corner store for an ice cream but ended up going to the arts & crafts market. There really wasn’t much of a market when we got there and we ended up in a very pleasant park instead. I reminded Greg that he was probably missing the football game. “Oh, dear,” he said, a grin on his face. We strolled and

meandered and wandered and generally took it easy, communing with nature and watching the geese in a little zoo. We eventually made our way back to the hotel just minutes before the weary sportsmen dragged themselves in. Steve Lawson seemed to have sustained the worst injury with a pulled muscle or something though the rest of them limped around for the rest of the afternoon as well.

As it promised to be a long and most desperately fun evening I decided to bath and nap early. There was to be a U.K. Worldcon/Eurocon/fandom panel at 5:30 at which time Greg was going to debate his TAFF ideas as recently put forward in his *Stop Breaking Down* 7. I didn't want to miss it. "Now be sure and wake me up before anything happens." "Yes, dear." "You'll wake me up before the panel starts, right?" "Yes, dear." So in trusting innocence I go for a nice long bath and then lie down for a nap. At 5:45 I wake up and look at the clock.

"Ohmygawd – his panel's started!" I leaped up in confusion for the second evening in a row, threw on my clothes yet again and scrambled downstairs, muttering under my breath, wondering why he didn't wake me, what reason did he have for wanting me asleep and out of the way. I arrive breathless in the function room. Dave Langford's in front giving his TAFF report talk. I locate Greg sitting towards the back of the room with Chris, both leaning towards each other and chatting in low giggling voices. I sit in the nearest chair trying to figure out what's going on, directing a heavy cold stare towards Gregory.

It finally dawns on me that things are running late and that the panel hasn't started yet which doesn't stop me from feeling that desperate fun has gone on while I slept and I continued my hard cold stare. Greg notices me at last and smiles but I give him one of those "You've done something wrong and I'm not happy" looks. Dave's talk ended and Ian announced that the panel would begin as soon as everybody refreshed their drinks. Convinced that Greg would have let me sleep on and miss all the fun I trudge back towards the room. Maybe I'll learn to enjoy staring out of windows at alleyways. Greg caught up with me on the stairs. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. No – go on – go back to your fun. I'll just.... stare out the window."

"What are you talking about?" I explained that I thought he was having so much fun that he forgot about me. He explained that he wanted to let me sleep as long as possible. It was a typical case of cross-communications. All

was forgiven and we went back to the bar for a drink before the panel began. I didn't *really* want to stare at the alleyway.

So there was the panel: Ian Williams in the middle with Dave Langford on one side and Greg and Alan Dorey on the other. I could tell by the way Greg had lurched into his seat with a double vodka in hand that he was primed for an audience. Ian started the ball rolling by putting forth the question of whether or not TAFF should exist. Langford took a very sensible defence before Greg launched himself into a tirade of disconnected thoughts and phrases all having something to do with the uselessness of TAFF. People in the audience brought up point after point but Greg shot each one down in traditional gun-slinger fashion. Poor dear.... I could see his little brain spinning in a vodka hazed confusion. Having discussed "all this" at home many evenings I had a good idea of what he was trying to say and decided a prompt was in order.

"Yes, O.K – " I shout out, "but what about U.S./U.K. contact?"

"Shut up. That has nothing to do with it." ("Oh, Gawd," I thought, "he's really lost.")

"No, no," I shout back, "it is a point." ("Remember, Greg? All those nights we talked about contact?")

"Contact! Who needs contact ..." he continues on. I sit back in resignation knowing I'd hear all about it later ("It was awful, I couldn't get my thoughts together. I missed all the points I wanted to make." "Yes, dear.") Meanwhile he's still lashing out at the audience and lingering far too long on the point of affording a U.S. trip. "O.K – now," he calls out, "I want to see a show of hands of all of you who in no conceivable way short of selling your wife and house could afford to fly to the U.S." About a dozen hands go up.

"Put your hand down," he snaps pointing to Paul Turner, the kid with the pool cue. "You're only 14 bloody years old. What do you know about money? All you gotta do is ask your parents. They gave you enough to come here for a weekend with your own fucking pool cue. I'm sure they'd send you to the U.S. just to get rid of you for another weekend." I wondered if this would hurt his little 14 year old ego but hell, the kid's in fandom now. Egos either get tough or break in fandom.

After an hour or so of fevered discussion Ian called a halt to the panel and all went separate ways for awhile. We wandered back to a corner of the lobby and waited for something to happen. It didn't take long. D. West pulled out a pack of cards and slapped them on the table. I looked across at Greg and

shuddered at the gleam that lit his eyes. Not a word was spoken as they pulled out their wallets and laid a pound each on the table.

“Cut the deck, high card wins,” Greg challenges. D. mumbles his approval. They cut the deck. Greg takes the high card and the two pounds. They cut again. D. wins.... again.... back and forth they win and lose equally for awhile.

“Enough,” says one, I don’t remember who, and a five pound note is placed on the table and matched.

A hush falls among those watching. Greg cuts first, then D. “Shit.” D. throws down a deuce and Greg with a face card picks up the money. D. pulls out another fiver and Greg matches it. They cut. “Oh, hell.”

D. throws down a three and Greg again picks up the money. I gasped when D. pulled out another fiver. Greg matches it. They cut. Before Greg even gets to look at his card D. lets out a string of low curses and showing the deuce he’d drawn, hurls the deck at a gleeful giggling Gregory, only slightly cutting him on the forehead. So go the games of Chance.

Of course having crossed a Master I expected to see Greg break out in a plague of boils any minute but D. was more subtle. By the end of the con Greg’s piles had returned.

Back in the function room we waited for the next program item, something called “Faanish Fortunes,” and wondered if this had anything to do with the questionnaires. Every registered member had been mailed a questionnaire some weeks before the con and asked to answer some 20 odd questions such as “Who’s your favourite fan? Who’s the best dressed fan? Drunkest fan? Most lovable? The fan you’d like to be on a desert island with?” and on in a similar vein. Each member who returned the questionnaire received a free drink token which would be good later that evening.

Our questions were about to be answered. Two teams were thrown together: the Friends in Space vs. the Mong Family. Kev Williams took his place beside a chalk board. Sue sat to the side with pencil and paper and Harry stepped forward attired in formal faanish game host gear: T-shirt with tie. He began.

“We’ve polled a select audience and tabulated their answers to certain questions.” A moan arose from the audience as they began to catch on. “All right, Friends In Space, we asked our audience who the worst dressed fan was and we got three different answers. See if you can guess who they are but if you get three misses it goes to the Mong Family.” And so the game went with

Kev writing the answers on the chalkboard and Sue keeping score. Greg and D. West protested at being among the worst dressed fans and fans who fell down the most. “Don’t blame me,” explained the host, “this is what the public says.” Eve Harvey clearly came out a winner as a favourite fan, cuddly fan and fan people would want on a desert island (*and she’s a good pool player! I must find out her secret.*) Roz Kaveney and I tied in second place as female fan with the biggest appendages. Sheesh. There were many laughs and many surprises, all in fun. The Friends In Space won but before the wine prizes were given Harry had one more announcement.

“This year we’re starting something new at Silicon. We’re presenting a Sili Award given for extreme silliness during 1981. This year’s winner tried to start a silly fan fund at Yorcon for an activity that didn’t quite take place as well as bringing British Bulldog to cons.” I look at Gregory but he looks confused. Harry unveils the award: a lovely little green plastic worm glued to a plastic base. “This year’s award goes to.... Greg Pickersgill.” He hands it to Greg who still looks confused. “Are you taking the piss out of me?”

“And,” Harry continues, “the committee has provided a buffet for you which should be set up out in the lobby now. Mr Pepper, the manager, has generously donated a pot of curry and rice to our buffet because he remembered how Dr. Jackson likes his curry. So go on up front, use your drink tokens and help yourself to the buffet and Dr. Jackson Memorial Curry.” The room quickly emptied and we filled our glasses and plates with goodies. Knowing that Greg wasn’t functioning at full capacity I gave him a few sandwiches and sat him in a chair. “Is he taking the piss out of me?” It was then that he noticed the two extra drink tokens that came with the award and decided that taking the piss or not, it was a good award.

The last programmed activity for the evening was the charades final which our team lost because I botched up so badly on *Juniper Time*. Bleh. Back in the lobby desperate fun was going on at a fevered pitch. Greg had opened his bottle of Lambrusco and we drank a toast to the achievement of our goal. Greg’s fun got a little too desperate and I helped him back to the room where he said he was going to “rest a bit” before re-joining the party for more fun. Yes, dear, whatever you say.

Back downstairs I sat with a group, chatting and laughing. Paul Turner, boy wonder, had joined us. He’d been drinking steadily all day and was now very vocal about any and all topics of conversation. Hansen seemed annoyed. He glanced at his watch. “Isn’t it past your bedtime, kid?”

“No, I stay up as late as I want.”

“I was afraid of that.”

We go on talking around the boy’s almost tangible enthusiasm. “Where does he get so much energy?” someone asked. Suddenly David Pringle sits up. “Tell you what,” he says to Paul, “I’ll race you around the block.” We all stare at David as if he’s gone mad.

“Sure, O.K. yeah,” says Paul and up and out the door they go. We all stare at each other now wondering what’s going on. A few minutes later Pringle dashes in, across the lobby, straight up the stairs and isn’t seen again that night. Paul trots in a half a minute later and sits back down with us.

“Wow, that was all right.” The rest of us old folk just moan.

Conversations got a bit slower and more serious and Paul leaves to join the group at the bar. “At last,” grumbles Hansen who at the ripe old age of 25 seems to have grown intolerant of the younger generation. I point this out to him. “No, it’s just that I hate kids,” he says.

Next thing we know Harry is guiding Paul back to our corner and sits him in a chair. Putting a hand on my shoulder he appeals to my maternal/teacher instincts. “Keep an eye on him, will you? I think he’s had a bit much to drink.” Paul looks like he’s falling asleep so I agree.

“Asleep? Asleep? Where’s a pen – a felt tip pen.” It’s Alan Dorey who never looks drunk even as you watch him trip over his own two feet and fall off a chair. I dig up a pen for him and he skilfully begins writing on the boy’s face. Paul twitches and flicks at his face and eventually wakes up. Alan backs off but Paul takes no notice as he puts his hand over his mouth and makes for the nearest toilet. It’s the last we see of him for the night.

It grew later and those remaining grew sillier. Arnold was explaining the fine art of shooting rubber bands to me. Dave Bridges and I tried to talk music. Stan Eling came over and played with the hand puppets I’d brought along for silly people. Close to dawn I finally packed it in. In the room I found Greg fast asleep across the bed. I undressed him and tucked him between the sheets which is not an easy task when he’s growling and blindly swinging his fist in his sleep. I decided to miss breakfast the next morning.

It was close to noon by the time we made it to the lobby the next day. Bags were stacked all around as people prepared to check out. We’d just missed saying good-bye to Chris and Rob who had to drive back early to London. At the bar I ordered a pint of lager and a cheese sandwich and fell into conversation with Dave Bridges. Vernon and Pat Brown were standing

beside us and joined in. My brain just wasn't ready for a conversation with Vernon. I was still trying to remember my name and he's discussing linguistics. Oh, my poor brain. Fortunately Dave and I got back to a less intellectual discussion such as whether or not Britain should have an apa. "Yes," I says.

"No," he says.

"Yes." "No." "YES!" "NO!" Ah, here's a Monday morning conversation I can handle.

It gets close to 4:00 and the group is really shrinking. As we're riding back with the Doreys, we have to wait until Alan gets back from taking someone to the station. The crowd is now down to Rochelle and the Maules. "Well, looks like the end of the con," someone observes. "Yup," someone replies.

We sit and stare some more. "Sure was fun." "Yup." More silence. Alan arrives and we get our bags out to the car. I usually make a round of goodbyes at cons, but here we were all but the last to leave. "Well, goodbye Ian. Good-bye Janice."

"Good-bye." It was a good con.

Star Illo

Harry Bell, Tynecon '74 programme book, April 1974

[L-r: Rob Jackson, Irene Bell, Harry Bell, Ian Williams, Ian Maule.]

The Tynecon '74 Committee



Back Cover

Harry Bell, "Steppin' Out", *Out of the Blue* 1, November 1979



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The End

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